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9 SHORT STORIES: Crime and Detection—ALL NEW

TIGER ON THE PREMISES	Anthony Gilbert	6
FATHER CRUMLISH'S LONG HOT SUMMER	Alice Scanlan Reach	18
CAN YOU FIND THE ACE?	Julian Symons	35
THE THEFT OF THE WICKED TICKETS	Edward D. Hoch	40
ODDS BODKINS AND THE DUTCH MASTER	Richard Curtis	58
THE ONES LEFT BEHIND	Joan Richter	86
NOT LOST ANY MORE	Florence V. Mayberry	99
THAT DAY ON THE KNOB	William Brittain	137
MOTIVE	Lawrence Treat	150

SPY STORY—novelet

THE PROPERTY OF A LADY	Ian Fleming	67

FIRST PRIZE WINNER—novelet

DOUBLE IMAGE	Roy Vickers	106

EQMM "FIRST STORY"—NEW

GIVE A MAN ROPE	Roy Lester-Pond	53
HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH		52
BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH	John Dickson Carr	65

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Well, Miss Sarah Aitken, 64, heard her front doorbell ring one evening and, to quote the villain, "Ladies living alone can't be too careful, can they?"

The villain's words were smooth as cream, "but there was something about his smile that made Sarah think of a tiger..."

A story of menace and terror and surprise...

TIGER ON THE PREMISES

by ANTHONY GILBERT

MISS SARAH AITKEN, 64 YEARS old and looking every prosperous year of it, had just set out a fresh hand of solitaire when the front doorbell rang. Prudently she went to the window and peered out, but all she could see was the gray autumnal fog pressing against the pane. Behind her the clock chimed seven thirty. No car stood at the gate, whose outline she could just discern; no friendly hand tapped the mailbox reassuringly. Television and radio voices repeatedly warned elderly women living alone to be careful when they answered doors after dark.

The bell rang for the second time. "Pooh, it'll just be someone coming back from the fete, calling in on their way," she told herself robustly. But the man who stood on her doorstep, tall, smiling, casual, with a luxuriant dark mustache and bushy eyebrows that somehow didn't quite match, was someone she had never seen before.

"No," said Miss Sarah, quickly

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beginning to close the door again, having been warned many times about the intrusive foot. "I don't buy at the door."

She was a little woman, dumpling-shaped, with beautiful hands—card-sharpers' hands, her friends sometimes teased her—and beautifully set white hair. Altogether, for all her shortness, a woman to remember.

The caller put out a negligent hand and laid it against the door panel. "Who says I've anything to sell?" he murmured.

Miss Aitken reminded herself of young men looking very much like this one who came round at all hours collecting for societies with names like Feed the Hungry or House the Homeless. She wished she'd brought her purse to the door.

"Are you collecting for something?" she inquired bluntly, and he laughed and said, "I'd be wearing a badge or something then, wouldn't I? And if I wasn't I ought to be. I mean, how could you tell —?"

"I'm afraid you've come to the wrong house," said Sarah firmly.

"That wouldn't be easy, would it, seeing it's the only one for about half a mile. Besides, this is Appletree Cottage, isn't it?" He seemed to come nearer as he spoke, without actually moving. It was very odd; she didn't like it at all.

"Yes, but —"

"You and your friend must be really private here," he murmured, and she stiffened.

"You've been misinformed. I have no one living with me."

"You must be a very brave old lady. Don't you even have a dog?"

"Not even a budgerigar. I don't care for birds in cages, and dogs require exercise."

"On your owney-oh then? So I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" He smiled. He had beautiful teeth and she remembered Red Riding Hood's wolf. *All the better to eat you with, my dear.* She chided herself for her folly. All the same, she liked it less than ever, realizing she'd been taken in by the oldest trick in the book.

"What is it you want?" she asked, a trifle less firmly. "I don't know you—and I'm extremely busy . . ."

"Aren't you the lucky one? I'd be busy, too, if my car hadn't broken down half a mile back. I thought I must have struck the Sahara Desert or something, not a house, not a voice—don't know how you stand it, honest I don't."

"There happens to be a local fete on this evening. Practically everyone will be there."

"Lucky for me you don't fancy fetes, isn't it? Now, all I wanted to know, could I use your phone?"

She couldn't pretend there wasn't a phone because the instrument stood on a table in the hall, in full view. And to refuse his request

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would either prove the depth of her fear or show her up as a grouchy old maid who wouldn't recognize the milk of human kindness if it was passed to her in a cup.

"Okay if I come in?" the stranger coaxed.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid it's not your lucky night. My telephone happens to be out of order."

"Oh, come!" He laughed, not even pretending to believe such a cock-and-bull story. "You can do better than that, a clever old lady like you."

"I'm waiting for a repairman," she assured him steadily. "Otherwise I also would be at the fete. I'm afraid the nearest telephone is on the Green. That's about a mile down the road—you can't miss it."

He didn't budge. "Ah, but that one might be out of order, too."

Her blue eyes flashed. She took a couple of steps backward, snatched up the receiver.

"Try for yourself," she invited him.

He lounged gracefully into the hall, put the receiver to his ear. "So it is," he agreed in a more respectful tone. "I guess I owe you an apology, but, to tell you the truth, I thought you were just trying to put me off. Not that I could blame you really," he added, making the *amende honorable* for his previous offhand manner. "Ladies living alone can't be too careful, can they? Some of the stories you read in the papers—there was one the other day, I don't know if you saw it—some housekeeper in a big house, gang broke in, knocked her out, and got away with a small fortune, according to the press. Poor old girl! She's still in the hospital."

"Not any longer," Sarah corrected him with gentle firmness. "She died this afternoon without recovering consciousness. It was on the six o'clock news."

Her companion looked abashed. "Oh, I say! No wonder you were a bit cagey when I came ringing at your bell. Mind you, a more sensible party wouldn't have tried to do a Casabianca act; she'd know heroes are out of date, and after all, what's a handful of jewels compared with a human life?"

"It was more than a handful of jewels," insisted the old woman quietly. "It was a sense of responsibility. It's like a spine in the body: if you haven't got it you can't hope to stand upright. She'd been left in charge, so I suppose she felt an obligation to the Whyteleafe family. She'd been employed by them for more than thirty years."

"I hope they feel good about it," the young man remarked. "Leaving all that stuff—worth over thirty thousand, wasn't it? — in the care of one old woman. Mind you, I don't say she wasn't brave,

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but beyond a certain point courage gets confused with vanity. Whether she realized it or not there was probably a thought in her mind that she might be asked to appear on TV—the housekeeper who foiled the thieves."

Sarah felt the color rising in her cheek. "A singularly ungenerous comment," she said. "You do understand where the public telephone is, don't you? Even in this fog you can hardly lose your way."

"You know," he said, "you've got the best of it, being at home. Your friends at the fete are going to have their work cut out finding their way back. I suppose you weren't thinking of making a cup of tea. I've been taking wrong bends for the last two hours, it's too late for the tea shops to be open, and since this breathalyzer nonsense I don't dare drink and drive."

"I don't have tea at this hour," Sarah explained. "It will be suppertime in a few minutes."

"Sounds cosy. So while I'm losing my way looking for this phone you'll be sitting at the fireside—" He was a tall fellow; it was easy for him to look over her shoulder but since she'd drawn the sitting-room door close, all he could glimpse was a reflection from the firelight on the wall. "It's what you might call an oasis."

"You might," Miss Aitken agreed. "I shouldn't. Oases are found only in deserts."

"What d'you call this?" he demanded. So far he hadn't plunged toward the room but it was obvious he wasn't going to walk quietly out. "Don't you ever get lonely?"

"If I didn't like this way of living, obviously I should change it."

He let out a harsh, grating laugh. "As easy as that. You've got it made, haven't you? I take it you won't mind me having a bit of a warm before I go back into the fog?"

This was it, she thought; this was what he'd intended from the start. With unexpected vigor she sprang back, barring the sitting-room door.

"I've told you, I'm busy. And it's not my habit to entertain people I don't know."

"It's not my habit to entertain people I don't know," he mimicked her. "You don't call this entertaining, I hope."

Her hands spread against the door panels as she cried scornfully, "You must think I'm a fool to be so easily taken in. You didn't come here to use a telephone, did you? And you're not just passing through, as you're trying to suggest."

He clapped his hands. "First-class," he approved. "Ever been on the stage, auntie? You know, you're wasted on a little hole like this. I bet you'd have 'em rolling in the aisles."

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She surprised him with a sudden smile. "I did do some amateur theatricals as a young girl, and I used to dream of seeing my name in lights. Of course, my parents—to them it was unthinkable."

"I bet you have yourself a ball on your own all the same, though."

The smile vanished again. "I've already told you I've no working telephone and I'm not proposing to make any tea—"

"You've told me a lot more than that, auntie—you've told me you know why I'm here. Well, come on, spill it. Think I've come to rob you of the family jewels?"

"You've been listening to village gossip," she accused him swiftly. "That's the worst of living in a small community—no privacy at all. I suppose they told you I'm a miser, that I have sacks of gold in the cellar." She laughed. "Well, it's not true. For one thing, I don't have a cellar and if I did I wouldn't have anything valuable to put in it."

"So where *do* you keep it?" he asked, and an expert would have noticed the ominous change in his voice and manner. Up to this moment he had been cool, then probing; now he was assured, now he was truly dangerous.

"If it's money you want," she told him, keeping her voice steady, "I keep practically none in the house. I live on a small annuity, only keep a pound or two in cash. Village life isn't like town life, you know—you don't need ready money."

"I must try it some time," he said. "Now, how about letting me get a glimpse of the fire?"

"I told you, you can't come in here." She stretched her short arms as if to protect whatever was hidden by the door. "I have someone—"

"Naughty, naughty! You said you were all alone. Come on, auntie, let's solve the mystery." He moved lithely, sweeping her out of the way with his powerful young man's arm as if she were a straw doll. "Let's see—" His voice stopped abruptly; he stood on the threshold, his eyes bulging.

"'Strewth!" he said at last. "No wonder you didn't want anyone in. You must be some kind of a nut keeping all that stuff in the house. It's the real McCoy, isn't it?" he added sharply, moving toward the table where the jewels lay blazing under the lamplight. Rings, brooches, a pendant like drops of silver light—he put out a hand and touched them, as if he thought they were a figment of his imagination. Next to the pendant lay a cabochon emerald so brilliant it made his eyes blink.

"Just that 'ud keep me for years," he said. "What have you been doing, auntie? Robbing a jewelry store?"

Miss Aitken seemed to have recovered her dignity. "Extraor-

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dinary as it may appear to you, I am going to sell them. They're far too ostentatious for me—I could never wear them."

"They ought to be in a bank vault," he exclaimed accusingly. "Talk about putting temptation in the way of the weak! Does the village know you've got this stuff on the premises?"

"What's the sense of burying beauty in a bank? Oh, I've known for some time there was no point my keeping them, but all my life I've loved beautiful jewels. When I acted with my amateur company, somehow I always seemed to get the dowager parts—heroines in those days had to be tall and willowy. One thing though—I got to wear the jewelry; of course, it was only costume stuff, but I used to dream of a day when I should have—what was that expression of yours?—the real McCoy. It's an odd thing, Mr. —you didn't tell me your name."

"You didn't ask me. Just call me Joe."

"An odd thing that life so often gives us what we've always wanted, but too late to be any use."

"Misses the bus, in fact?" he agreed. "All the same, I wouldn't have thought it was ever too late to get your paws on *this* sort of thing."

"You've clearly never lived in a village. How could I go out at my age and in my circumstances wearing any of these? To begin with, no one would think they were real—"

"And if they did, you wouldn't have them long," he finished smoothly. "You know what you said about being a miser—not so far from the truth, is it? I suppose you sit and gloat—"

"I should be sorry if I had nothing better to do with my time," she replied curtly. "No. If you came through the village you doubtless saw the placards—National Appeals Week. Well, a person like myself living on an annuity can't contribute very much in cash, but there are these—"

"Are you loco?" he asked. "Or do you think it's a case of a little green apple hung up in a tree? It's a long time since I was as green as *that*."

"They should fetch a considerable amount on the present market," Sarah continued. "If the insurance is anything to go on—"

"How come a little old lady like you ever got your paws on them in the first place? They'll ask you that wherever you're planning to offer them."

"In which case I shall be able to satisfy them without any difficulty. It's a strange thing to be the last member of your family—there's literally no one else to inherit."

"So you're going to give the whole shoot away to some good cause?"

"Can you think of anything bet-

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ter I could do with them than help the poor and needy?"

"Since you put it like that the answer's No. Only there's no sense you going to London—tricky, too, if it were to come out what you were carrying. Or are you getting someone to come down and value them here? Either way I've got a better idea. Why not give them to the poor and needy on your own doorstep? Well, not precisely on the doorstep now—"

His words were smooth as cream; he was smiling, but there was something about his smile that made Sarah think of a tiger, that graceful treacherous beast.

"I don't know what you're talking about." She was panting now. "But I must ask you to go. I'm expecting a friend—"

"If you mean the chap who's going to repair the telephone he won't come out tonight and who can blame him? And nor will anyone else in their right senses. You'll be on your owney-oh from now till tomorrow morning at least, and seeing tomorrow's a Sunday—"

"No," Sarah whispered, and she spread out her hands above that gleaming heap as if she were truly a match for his unscrupulous youth and strength.

"I don't want to hurt you," said Joe, "honest, I don't. But old ladies that don't see reason get into trouble, don't they? I mean, there was that housekeeper we talked about. If she'd showed a bit more sense—It's not as if I'm really robbing *you,* am I? Seeing you meant to give them away in any case."

"They'd catch you—you know they would," she flashed at him. "I'd only have to describe the jewels—"

"I wouldn't do that," he advised her, cool as before. "Naturally, I wouldn't hang around here, but I've got a mate—Don his name is and no questions asked. He's not so reasonable as me, and don't start telling me I can keep my big trap shut, because he isn't only my mate, he's my partner. And so far as he knows he never had an old mother, so—well, you *are* going to be sensible, aren't you?"

"You wouldn't get away with it," she whispered. "The jewels would be—what's that expression you hear on television?—hot."

"That 'ud be my trouble, wouldn't it? I really wouldn't advise you to tangle with Don. Oh, of course you could keep the bolts shot and pretend not to hear the bell, but there's more ways of getting into a house than through a front door."

"Don't do it," she implored him. "I promise you'll be sorry for it all your life."

"I could say the same to you, only with Don after you you wouldn't have much time for regrets."

"You've done this before," she accused him. "I don't know how

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you knew about these, but—you meant what you said, didn't you? You would tell your friend?"

"Up to you." He pulled a small dark bag out of his pocket and began to cram the jewels into it. Sarah stood staring, making no attempt to stop him. Considering the value of the haul it was amazing how little space it occupied.

"Sorry about that cup of tea," he said jauntily, turning toward the door. "I could have done with that." He pushed rudely past her into the hall, stumbling against the table where the telephone stood, so that it came crashing to the ground. He looked at her and grinned. "Clumsy me! I'm afraid it's going to take more than one visit from a repairman to get that in working order again. Still, it's not as though you'll be needing it, is it?"

Sarah Aitken leaned against the wall, her hands tightly interlocked. "You needn't be afraid," she said. "I won't tell the police a word. If—if they do find out it won't be through me, I promise you that."

"Then we'll have to hope they don't find out, won't we? Don's such an impulsive chap and naturally you don't want to make a pair with that old housekeeper in the morgue."

Out he went, pleased as Punch, leaving her to shut the door behind him. Two hundred yards away he got into the little black car he'd parked out of sight. In this fog no one would see him or be able to recognize him again if they did. He peeled off the glossy black wig, the flourishing mustache. He'd drop them in a rubbish bin on the way back, and who was going to connect a fair-haired clean-shaven young man with Miss Aitken's visitor?

"A piece of cake," he hummed, and just when he needed cake most. He hadn't been very lucky of late. If you can't do better than this, Lou, Mr. Norrick had snapped, you'd better give it up and take to market gardening. Only naturally he couldn't do that, not knowing as much as he did. The boys wouldn't let him walk out that easy. And now his luck had turned. It had been sheer chance that took him into The Ship for a pint on the way back. There'd been a couple of old girls at a table nearby, nattering away fit to beat the band. The word money fell on his attentive ear.

"I tell her she's mad keeping all that in the house," one had said. "Put it in the bank, I told her, you're asking for trouble. That was after she got the money for the compensation. But no, her father was once ruined by a bank and she'll never have anything to do with them."

"You can't tell a woman like that anything, can you? And living in that lonely place, too. Anyone could walk in—you do read about

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such things in the papers. One of these days, I tell her, there'll be a picture of Appletree Cottage on the front page, with a cross to show where the body was found."

"That brooch she wears—real diamonds my George says, and he should know."

They'd abandoned the subject, and he'd finished his beer and come out mighty thoughtful. It was drawing a bow at a venture, of course, but it's no crime to ask to use a telephone, and after that he'd play it by ear. Mind you, he'd never expected to make a haul like this, and he didn't believe for one minute that she'd been going to give the stuff away. She was a real old miser, fondling her treasures as misers used to caress their gold pieces. It was a pity he hadn't been able to lay his hands on the money, too, but you can't win 'em all. This was going to make Mr. High-and-Mighty Norrick sing a very different tune.

Mr. Norrick was busy doing his accounts later that evening when the door of his office opened—clocks meant nothing to him, he worked all round them—and a tall fair young man stuck his head in.

"Evening, Mr. Norrick," he said jauntily. "'Scuse this late call, but—if you've got a minute."

"You should buy yourself a watch, Lou," said Mr. Norrick sourly. "Did you never hear of office hours?"

"Not wasting your time, I promise you that."

"That'll make a change, won't it? The boys aren't too pleased with your record, you know. And when the boys aren't pleased they can turn nasty. I told you from the start, we can't afford errors in our line—too much at stake."

"Yes Mr. Norrick." Lou got the message. Don's proclivities weren't confined to obstinate old ladies. Still, she'd never sing. He'd seen her face when he mentioned Don. And he hadn't exaggerated at that. If Don were on his tracks he'd drop into the river and be glad of the chance. A chain's as strong as its weakest link and he knew what they thought of him. Going to be different from now on, though.

Waiting for Mr. Norrick to notice him again, he relived that triumphant moment in Appletree Cottage.

"I won't tell the police a word. If they do find out it won't be through me, I promise you that."

"Well?" said Mr. Norrick in an indifferent voice, laying down his pen.

"Got some stuff here that might interest you," Lou offered blandly, putting his hand into his pocket.

"Hot?" Mr. Norrick inquired.

"As a cold bath. No, you'll never find this batch on a police list."

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"Sure of yourself, aren't you?" Mr. Norrick said. He mistrusted confident young men, particularly those with records like Lou's.

"Some old ladies," elaborated Lou, "don't fancy being roughed up. 'Specially with tonight's news about the housekeeper in the Whyteleafe affair."

"Never heard of police protection?" Mr. Norrick asked.

"This one won't ask for it. She was going to give the stuff away anyhow—at least, that's what she said."

"And you swallowed that?"

"Needy children or some such cause. They do get ideas, these old girls."

"Maybe she thought it would be fun to lead you up the garden path. Come off it, Lou, people don't give things away that are worth anything."

"Got a bee in her bonnet about the starving world. Almost had me weeping. No need to go to the far East to find chaps in need, I told her, only got to stretch out your hand."

"You talk too much," Mr. Norrick growled. "Shows your amateur status. More chaps have talked themselves into a rope necktie—"

"I never laid a finger on her," cried the young man virtuously. "And even if she did break her word and go to the rozzers, what could she tell them? A chap with a black mustache and black hair called to ask if he could use the telephone." He stood up and surveyed his own appearance with pleasure in a long glass hanging against the wall. "Don't see anyone answering that description here, do you, Mr. Norrick?"

"Let's see what you've got," said Norrick, imperturbable, skeptical. That was his gimmick—never show excitement or let the other chap see you're eager; *you're* doing *him* a favor, and never let him forget it.

Lou opened the dark little bag and with a dramatic gesture poured the contents onto the table—ruby and emeralds, diamonds and pearls. "And this little old dame had the lot because she's the last of her family. There's a ring here, a real beauty."

He picked out the cabochon emerald and stood turning it in his hands so that it caught the gleam of the economical light. Mr. Norrick took it from him; then, speechless, he turned his attention to the other pieces.

"Well?" Lou asked impatiently.

"What did you say she told you? That she inherited them? Happen to get her name?"

"There now!" Lou struck an attitude of mock remorse. "I never thought to ask. Still, she won't be making any complaints—I explained to her that wouldn't do her a bit of good. Mind you, she got quite pathetic. Don't do it, she said. You'll be sorry all your

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life if you take them."

"Could be she was right, Lou."

"Seeing you don't wear them and they're only a burden, I'm doing you a favor, I told her."

"So you were, Lou, so you were. I bet she's laughing her head off."

Lou turned pale. "I don't think I get you, Mr. Norrick. You're not telling me they're not the real McCoy?"

"They're the real McCoy all right. Better for you if they weren't." Suddenly his fury broke: "You bloody blundering fool, why don't you do your homework for a change? Do you know what these are? They're all pieces from the Whyteleafe Collection. Oh, no, your old lady won't ring the police or give 'em any description of what's missing, because they're all on the police records already. And now that old fool of a housekeeper's gone and died, it's not burglary any more, it's murder. I hope for your own sake you've got an alibi for that night."

"But, Mr. Norrick—I mean, it can't be! I mean, she told me about the housekeeper herself. She'd only just heard—"

"And couldn't get rid of the stuff fast enough. And you come along and offer to relieve her of the evidence against her. And as if that isn't enough, you bloody great booby, you have to come direct to me, to me that has to walk as carefully as an elephant in an egg farm."

Lou, all his jaunty manner gone, stood shaking in his boots.

"She *couldn't* have, not an old biddy like that—"

"You know the police version, I suppose? They're convinced the job was the work of a gang and they say that a woman was concerned. The Whyteleafe Collection is believed to have been split up and part at least to have been taken out of the country the same night. As for the rest—take it and get out. Did you hear me? *Get out!* And if there should be any trouble, remember, I never set eyes on you. And if my name gets pulled into this, when the police are through with you I'll turn the boys on to you, and you won't want to do any more looking in mirrors for the rest of your life."

"Serve her right if I went back and chucked them into her garden," cried Lou, with a venom that would have made anyone more human than Mr. Norrick squirm where he sat.

"You do that, and don't blame me if she's sitting behind the curtains with a movie camera, waiting for you. Might even have some chap doing a bit of gardening—pruning, say. You need a good sharp knife for pruning."

The frightful thing was that Lou was now convinced that Mr. Norrick was right. Half-heartedly he began to shuffle the loot into the accursed little black bag. What he was going to do with it now,

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don't ask. Try and drop it in the river, though his blood curdled at the thought of the waste, and you could be sure some nosey copper would be watching from behind Cleopatra's Needle.

"You should be wearing gloves," Mr. Norrick said. "Made of asbestos. And if you have some idea of stowing them somewhere till the heat's off, you'll be drawing your pension first. The police don't like burglars, but when it comes to beating up an old woman so that she doesn't come round—for keeps—"

"They can't tie me up with *that,*" Lou moaned.

"You don't do our policemen justice, Lou, really you don't. If it comes to a showdown between you and a dear old lady, who do you think they're likely to believe? Not the boy from Borstal. And now—did you get the message? *GET OUT!* Anyone see you come here?"

"No, Mr. Norrick, I'm sure they didn't."

"You see to it no one sees you leave. I'm warning you for your own good. And—Lou?"

"Yes, Mr. Norrick?"

"Just think about taking a holiday for a while, for the benefit of your health—some place a nice long way off where the boys won't catch up with you. And don't bother to leave any forwarding address—not unless you're keen to enter for the Churchyard Stakes."

In her quiet sitting room, the fire burning, the fog shut out, Sarah Aitken shuffled her pack of cards. It was a point of honor with her to try to play out one hand each evening, fair and aboveboard. Tonight, for the first time since that disastrous raid, she felt at peace. She didn't know where the others were, and she didn't want to know—any more than they wanted to know about the jewels. "We'll leave it to you, Sarah," they'd said. "You've got the brains of the bunch."

"I'm doing you a favor," that young man had said. Many a true word spoken in jest, she reflected. Even if the police did come asking questions—and why should they?—she only had to say a dark young man with a big mustache had wanted to use her phone, but she'd directed him to the one on the Green, hers being out of order and duly reported. And who was going to contradict her?

Not the young man who called himself Joe. One thing about being an amateur actress, it enabled you to spot makeup. The St. Dunstans Amateurs would never have passed Joe.

She finished laying out the cards and turned over the first card.

Jack of Spades on Queen of Hearts. Shift the red ten to the Jack of Spades. Ace of diamonds.

"This one," announced Sarah, "is going to play out, I'm sure of it."

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a *NEW* Father Crumlish story by

ALICE SCANLAN REACH

Perhaps the most poignant and certainly the most timely story in this series... The Mayor of Lake City was afraid of a long hot summer, and St. Brigid's parish was the most vulnerable section. And with good reason: St. Brigid's was a melting pot—Irish, Italians, Germans, Poles, Scandinavians, all living in a neighborhood with the highest rate of poverty and crime in the city. And then the long hot summer exploded, and Father Francis Xavier Crumlish, who had been fighting the Devil so long and so hard, now faced his most difficult challenge...

FATHER CRUMLISH'S LONG HOT SUMMER

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

HAPPENING TO GLANCE OUT THE rectory window, Father Francis Xavier Crumlish saw Nicholas LoVarco trotting up the sidewalk, and the priest's mouth watered. Once a month, without fail, the roly-poly proprietor of Nick's Meat Market called on St. Brigid's pastor and presented him with a package containing a prime rib roast of beef. Father was well aware of the reason for the stout little butcher's generous gesture: Nick knew that St. Brigid's meager household budget forbade such luxuries as roast beef. But this harsh fact was never acknowledged. Instead, the verbal exchange between the priest and his parishioner invariably ran along the lines that it did this bright early-summer morning.

"I overstocked on beef again, Father," Nick said with a perfectly straight face. "Any chance you could use a few ribs?"

"They'll not go to waste, Nick," Father replied, taking the proferred package. He put a hand on the butcher's burly shoulder. "Sit

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down while I take this to the kitchen and get both of us a cup of tea."

Nick's large brown eyes glowed, and Father suspected that, if the butcher's business warranted it, he would gladly have provided a side of beef every week just for the privilege of drinking tea with his pastor.

Some hours later, as Father Crumlish sopped up the last trickles of rich, red juice on his plate, Emma Catt, his housekeeper for the past 22 years, entered the dining room. She was a woman of commanding presence who was content to let the pastor run St. Brigid's parish as long as she could rule with an iron hand over the rectory's household.

"Finish up that beef, Father," Emma now said, pointing to the platter. "The Lord knows, a man your age needs good red meat."

Ordinarily the priest would have made a sharp retort to Emma's annoying reference to his advancing years. But he was preoccupied—fighting temptation as his dark blue eyes gazed longingly at the luscious rare beef. However—

"I've had more than enough—" he began to say.

"Then I'll save it for your supper tomorrow." Emma reached for the platter.

"Hold on," Father said. "I—ah—I'll take it up to my room. A bite or two might just appeal to me after Boys' Choir practice." In truth, he had quite a different destination in mind for the beef. But he had no intention of divulging it to his housekeeper who, he knew, would strongly disapprove.

As soon, therefore, as he heard sounds from Emma's room which told him she had settled down to her TV viewing, Father carefully wrapped up the remains of the roast and put it in the lower drawer of his desk. Then he crossed the bit of broken walk between the rectory and the church, climbed the creaking stairs to the choir loft, and seated himself at the ancient organ. Shortly afterward St. Brigid's rafters trembled under the impact of some thirty young treble voices: "Holy God, we praise Thy Name, Lord of all we bow before Thee!"

Gazing at his youthful parishioners gathered around him, Father Crumlish was filled with a sense of sadness. Although the youngest of the boys was ten and the oldest fourteen, and although they were of many different nationalities, there was a look of sameness about them. A hard, wise-beyond-their-years look—as if they had already experienced, firsthand, many of the harsh, cruel, degrading aspects of life. And, indeed, nearly every one of them had—simply because they lived in St. Brigid's parish, which was located in the dirt-encrusted, turbulent waterfront section of Lake

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City. Poverty, violence, and crime were the rule rather than the exception in the parish, and this environment was reflected on the thin sharp features of most of the members of Father Crumlish's Boys' Choir.

"You did a fine job, lads," Father said as he dismissed the group an hour later. "Mind you now, next week, same time." Then he placed a detaining hand on a slight-statured, undernourished fourteen-year-old. "Would you step around to the rectory with me, Angel?" he said. "I'd like a word with you."

Instantly Angel's dark eyes widened apprehensively. "Something wrong I do, Father?" Angel Flores had a soprano voice to match his given name and a sweet innocent-looking face. But there was a generous share of the devil in him, Father knew.

"Come along now, lad," the pastor said with a reassuring shake of his head. Moments later he withdrew the carefully wrapped package from his desk drawer. "I want you to take this nice piece of roast beef home to your mother, Angel—"

The boy's face flamed indignantly. "You think we not got enough to eat, Father? You think we need charity?"

"Why, of course not," the priest said soothingly. "I only thought your mother might welcome a slice or two of beef as a change from her usual spicy cooking." He shrugged indifferently. "On the other hand, if you've no taste for it—" He broke off and gave his attention to some papers on his desk.

Angel hungrily eyed the package as he shifted his slight frame from foot to foot. "Well," he finally said, "maybe beef be something different for her, no?"

"Suit yourself."

"Okay." He scooped up the package. "Thank you, Father," he said solemnly, then scampered out the door.

The pastor leaned back in his chair. They were so vulnerable! And the poorest among them, he sometimes thought, were the proudest and most easily offended.

A week later, as Father Crumlish entered a self-service elevator in Lake City's City Hall, he saw that it already had another occupant—his long-time good friend, Rabbi Ira Senfeld.

"How are you, Ira?" Father asked with a warm smile.

Rabbi Senfeld, a gray-haired, trim-mustached man whose solid, athletic build belied his fifty-plus years, gave the priest's outstretched hand a firm clasp. "Fine, Frank. And you?"

"I'll tell you after we leave the meeting where I've a notion we're both headed."

"I know what you mean," Rabbi Senfeld said as he pressed the elevator button for the floor hous-

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ing the offices of Steven Thompson, Mayor of Lake City.

In a few moments the pastor and the Rabbi entered the executive chamber and saw that it was filled with leaders of the city's civic, business, and community-service organizations. Mayor Thompson, a tall, well-groomed man in his mid-forties, extended his greetings and thanks to those assembled, then came straight to the point.

"There's no sense kidding ourselves," he said. "Lake City—like a lot of other places—could still be in for one of those long hot summers—mobs, riots, you know what I mean. What I'd like to have from each one of you is your estimate of the situation in your own locality—the temper and temperament of your own people. If we pool our information, maybe we can better assess our over-all problem." Then, one by one, the Mayor called upon the men and women present to respond. At last he came to Father Crumlish.

"We all know your job is a tough one, Father," he said. "St. Brigid's parish has the highest rate of poverty and crime in the city. You've got an explosive mixture there—Irish, Italian, German, Polish, Scandinavian—" He broke off and threw up his hands.

"Your Honor," Father Crumlish said, a twinkle in his dark blue eyes. "You forgot to mention 'heathen'."

The room erupted in laughter. It was common knowledge that St. Brigid's pastor firmly believed that all the people who lived within the boundaries of his parish were *his* people, regardless of their personal beliefs—or non-beliefs.

"What I thought, Father," Mayor Thompson said, a trifle disconcerted, "was that you might run into trouble because of the recent influx of Puerto Ricans."

"Well now," Father Crumlish replied mildly. "Most of them are just like everybody else—decent, God-fearing, and respectful of the law."

"But there *are* troublemakers. And, as I've said, we could still be in for a long hot summer."

"I've been dealing with troublemakers in St. Brigid's parish for forty years," Father said. "And I'll deal with them again. Any season. Long or short. Hot or cold."

"Then you don't want any extra police patrols? Any more protection?" The Mayor's anxiety was evident.

"With God's help," Father replied firmly, "we'll not be needing any."

When the meeting was concluded, Father Crumlish and Rabbi Senfeld once again were together in the elevator descending to the street floor.

"I hope your judgment of the situation proves correct," the Rabbi remarked.

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"So do I," the pastor answered fervently. "So do I."

The heat wave descended on Lake City in mid-August. As the temperature soared to the high nineties and stayed there, the residents sagged and sweltered. But, as usual, the hardest-hit area was St. Brigid's parish. The waterfront was a stagnant cesspool. Grime and fumes from the adjacent industrial plants, trapped in the motionless and humid air, enveloped the community like a shroud.

A week passed, two weeks, and still no relief was in sight.

With the exception of his essential priestly duties, Father Crumlish had spent every day, and most of every night, trodding the streets. By the middle of the third week he was humbly grateful to his Maker for two things. First, he'd been successful in keeping the heat-provoked temper of his people reasonably controlled because he'd happened to be in the right places at the right times to intervene in what might have been several serious brawls. Secondly, for some reason the heat and humidity seemed to ease his constantly plaguing arthritis so that he was able to get around faster and with less pain than usual.

Thus tonight, about nine o'clock, he was about to brace himself with a glass of iced tea before starting out again on what he thought of as "patrol duty," when the rectory doorbell began a rapid and insistent ringing. Even as he hurried to answer it, a frantic fist pounded on the door. Father opened it and Angel Flores all but fell into his arms.

"Father!" Angel cried wildly. "Quick—hide me!"

"Who's after you, lad?" Closing the vestibule door, the priest put his arm around Angel's shoulder and led him the few steps into his small office. "What's happened?" The youngster's only response was to burst into sobs. "Come now, Angel," Father Crumlish said in a kindly tone, "you can tell me. Whatever it is you've done—no matter how bad—"

"I not do it, Father!" Tears streamed from Angel's fear-filled eyes. "Honest, honest—I not do it!"

"Do what?" The pastor himself felt a faint tremor of fear.

"Stab him—"

"Stab!" Father caught his breath. "Who?"

"The butcher—LoVarco."

Father Crumlish's arm tightened around his young parishioner's shoulder. "How did it happen?"

"I don't know, Father. I not there—I don't see. All of a sudden there is noise around LoVarco's. I run over and somebody say the butcher stabbed. That when they start hollering my name—" The boy's voice faltered.

"Why yours?"

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Angel hesitated for a moment, looking shamefaced. "My switchblade do it."

"Your *what*?" At the expression on the pastor's face Angel trembled violently and hung his head. "How did you come to have a knife on you?" When Angel made no response Father shook him almost roughly. "Answer me!"

"I—I find it—couple weeks ago —I find it and carve my name on handle. I carry it in my pants pocket, but this afternoon we were playing stickball and it drop out, I think."

"When was Nick stabbed?"

"Just now. I got scared—run here." The boy gulped and raised his desperate eyes to meet the priest's troubled gaze. "You not let them get me, Father—please? They kill me for sure if you let them get me—"

"Have you told me the truth?"

"Yes, Father."

"You will swear to me that you didn't stab Nick?"

"I swear, I swear!" Angel crossed himself with a grubby hand.

The priest stared intently at him for a long moment. "All right, lad," he finally said, "I believe you." Dipping his hand into his desk drawer he drew out a rosary and thrust it into Angel's moist palm. "I'm going to step around there now and see what's going on. In the meantime—I want you to kneel here and say the beads. And mind you"—he shook a warning finger—"you're not to stir out of this room until I get back. Do you understand?"

"Y— yes, Father." Angel fell to his knees and once again made the sign of the cross.

"In between the 'Our Fathers' and 'Hail Marys'," Father Crumlish said at the door, "help yourself to that glass of iced tea."

Nick's Meat Market was located on Mohawk Street, just a block away from St. Brigid's church. As Father rounded the corner his heart lurched: the situation was much worse than he'd supposed. An ambulance had just pulled away from the curb in front of the market and its diminishing wail enabled him to hear shouts from a hundred angry throats.

Two police cars, their red dome lights flashing, were parked in the middle of the street. Uniformed officers were waving incensed men and women of all ages away from the cars, out of the street, and toward the opposite sidewalk. An officer standing by one of the patrol cars was using a bullhorn, pleading with the crowd to disperse and go to their homes. But his pleas were met with raucous jeers, catcalls, and cries of: "We want the punk who did it!" . . . "We want Flores!" . . . "Where's Angel Flores?"

Standing next to the officer operating the bullhorn was a tall broad-shouldered young man with

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a worried frown marring his handsome face. He was Lieutenant Thomas Patrick "Big Tom" Madigan of Lake City's police force. Years ago he had been one of the worst troublemaking young hooligans in St. Brigid's parish—until Father Crumlish had taken him firmly in hand.

"Where have you been, Father?" Madigan asked when the pastor appeared at his side. Big Tom knew that Father usually was the first on the scene when trouble erupted in the parish. "I was beginning to worry—"

"How's Nick?" Father interrupted.

"He was alive when they took him to the hospital," Madigan replied. "That's all I know."

"What happened, Tom?"

"LoVarco staggered out of his store and collapsed on the sidewalk. Somebody pulled a knife out of his ribs"—the policeman gestured toward the crowd—"and that's what all this commotion is about. They say the knife belonged to a young Puerto Rican kid—" Big Tom broke off with a warning cry as a large jagged rock sailed through the air and shattered the windshield of the patrol car. The crowd burst into cheers and applause.

"That tears it," Madigan growled. "Now we're going to have to move in."

"Hold on, Tom," Father said. "First, get me that bullhorn."

"Now wait a minute—" the policeman started to protest.

"Are you deaf, lad?" the priest demanded. Within seconds, bullhorn in hand, Father Crumlish stepped into the clearing in front of the patrol car and calmly surveyed the sea of angry faces.

Slowly, deliberately, he advanced until he stood, a solitary figure, in the middle of the street. The whirling red dome lights atop the police cars illuminated his slight stooped figure encased in the somber black cloth of his calling and caused his still-thick white hair, and the white circlet of his Roman collar, to shine like beacons in the sultry night. At the sight of him the clamorous voices began to subside, lapse into a murmur and finally into uneasy silence. Then Father Crumlish raised the bullhorn to his lips and the words he spoke thundered out.

"I don't have to tell you who I am. You all know me—and I know you—and tonight I'm ashamed to admit it. But it's you, every last one of you, who should be ashamed to be out here rabble-rousing." He took a few steps forward. "You there, Nils Pedersen," he said, pointing to a husky blond teen-ager of obvious Nordic origin. "You gave me your word a month ago that you'd mend your ways and stay out of trouble. Is this the way you keep your word?"

The pastor didn't wait to see

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Pedersen flush but pointed his finger at a slim, dark-haired, eighteen-year-old youth lounging against a lamppost. "And you, Tony Scalaro," he went on, his voice thick with scorn. "Your poor widowed aunt, Rosa, has slaved hard to keep you off the streets and out of mischief. Is this kind of behavior the thanks she gets?"

Again Father didn't pause to observe the effect of his scathing words as he brought his gaze to rest on two other youths who appeared to be the leaders of a group of Puerto Ricans. "And you two, Pedro Rodriguez and Orlando Garcia. A fine example you are for your people who are trying their best to make a life here in Lake City—"

"Sock it to 'em, Father!" a rasping voice interrupted.

The priest swung around and saw that the speaker was a pot-bellied, red-faced man who stood on wobbly feet at the edge of the crowd. "I might know I'd find you here, Mike Hanavan," he said in a harsh voice. "As usual, with too many beers in you and spoiling for a fight."

"It was one of *them* knifed Nick." Hanavan pointed to the group of Puerto Ricans. "That young punk Angel Flores." His words inflamed the crowd. "That's right!". . . "We want Flores!". . . "We'll fix the little—!"

Father Crumlish made no attempt to quiet them; he merely lowered the bullhorn and gazed contemptuously into each face, one after the other. Gradually the shouts and catcalls ceased and, as before, an uneasy silence hung in the air.

"So you want to take the law into your own hands, do you?" the pastor once again thundered through the bullhorn. "A fine lot you are to be talking like that! How many of you can say you never set foot inside a police station?" Father came closer to the crowd, swinging the bullhorn left and right. "But if you're so set on getting your hands on the Flores lad, I'll take you to him."

"Where is he?" someone shouted.

"I'll tell you where. In St. Brigid's rectory." There was a murmur of surprise. "Now, for all your bloodthirsty talk," the priest continued, "who's man enough here to come along with me?"

Father Crumlish waited for an answer, but no one spoke. "Now if I have to spend the night here, I will," he announced, a look of grim determination on his lined face. "I mean to stay here until every last one of you has gone about your business." Turning away, he walked over to the nearest policeman and handed him the bullhorn. Then he did an about face, folded his arms, and waited. Quietly, and with what seemed to be a feeling of relief, the people began to disperse.

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"I'll drive you home, Father," said Tom with relief and admiration, when the street was clear.

"Have you any word about Nick?" Father asked anxiously as he got into the patrol car.

"Only that he's still in shock and unconscious." Madigan shot Father a look. "I'll have to question young Flores. It was his switchblade that stabbed Nick. His name was carved on the handle."

"The lad's innocent, Tom."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"Well—we'll see."

The priest sighed, removed his bifocals, and rubbed his eyes with a weary hand. Several minutes later, followed by Big Tom, he opened his office door and then stood still. Angel Flores, his hands clutching the rosary and an empty glass beside him, was curled up on the floor, fast alseep.

"'It'll do no harm to let him have a few more winks, Tom," Father said softly.

Madigan frowned. "Listen, Father—"

"I was on the verge of having a nice glass of iced tea just before I went out. But now, to tell you the truth, I'm more in the mood for a wee tot of Irish whiskey."

"Father—"

"A pity it is you're on duty, lad," Father said, his eyes twinkling. "Otherwise you could join me. But what about a glass of tea?"

Madigan grinned. "Okay, Father. A glass of Irish iced tea!"

Father Crumlish arose before dawn the following morning, donned his cassock, and hurriedly drove his battered car to Mercy Hospital. He was relieved to be told that Nick LoVarco had regained consciousness during the night and that, although his condition was still critical, the doctors in charge were cautiously hopeful that he would recover. However, they had refused the police request to question him and, at the moment, the butcher was under heavy sedation. The pastor slipped quietly into Nick's room, knelt and said a silent prayer, then went directly to St. Brigid's sacristy and put on his vestments to say Mass.

The telephone was ringing when he returned to the rectory. "St. Brigid's," he said as he picked up the receiver.

"I've been trying to get hold of you, Father," Mayor Thompson said jubilantly. "What you did last night was great, absolutely great. I'd like to call a press conference this afternoon. Naturally you'll be the star performer. Just name the time—"

"Not so fast," Father Crumlish broke in. "I've no time today for anything like that."

"But Father," Thompson protested, "this is important!"

"It's more important that I try to find out who stabbed Nick."

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"That's been established—at least from the reports I've had. A young Puerto Rican—Angel Flores—admitted that it was his knife."

"That's no proof the lad's guilty."

"Well, no. But—"

Before the conversation could continue, the priest firmly but politely declined the Mayor's invitation and hung up the phone. It was barely noon, but already the temperature was well into the nineties when he left the rectory and started out again on his personal "patrol duty."

As he walked among the throngs on the streets trying to escape the unbearable heat of their tenements and ramshackle houses, Father persistently questioned men and women, young and old alike. In particular he scanned the crowds for the faces of those who had participated in last night's near-riot. He came across Mike Hanavan, but the man merely gazed bleerily at the pastor out of bloodshot eyes, mumbled, and shook his head. The priest also caught sight of some of the others who had been on the scene the night before, but when they saw him approaching they avoided a confrontation.

Despite his perseverance as he trod up and down the narrow sidewalks, Father was unable to discover anyone who could or would shed any light on the identity of Nick LoVarco's assailant. He already knew, as did all the residents in the neighborhood, that it was customary for Nick to keep his shop open on Saturday nights until nine o'clock, at which time he would turn off all the lights except one low-watt bulb on a dangling cord which hung near the front display case. Next he would lock the door, remove the unsold meat from the display cases, and store it in his walk-in refrigerator in the rear of the store. However, it developed that the butcher had not followed his usual routine last night. This information was given to Father by wizened, seventy-year-old Sadie Pilsudski.

"I dropped by a little after eight thirty for a pound of hamburger and Nick was already closed up," Sadie said. "But I could see him inside, so I rapped on the door and he let me in. Told me he was closing early 'cause it was too hot to work. Then he gave me my meat and—" Sadie paused, thinking.

"You've thought of something?" Father asked.

"Just remembered. When I was leaving I started to close the door, but Nick said to leave it open. Might let in a breath of air."

So that's how it happened, the priest reasoned as he left Sadie and continued down the street. The store in virtual darkness. Door wide-open. Nick leaving the place unguarded every few minutes

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while he carried meat into the big refrigerator. Any passerby on the sidewalk could easily slip inside, pull the cord and extinguish the light from the small overhead bulb, and steal the first thing in sight. And then just as easily slip out unobserved and mingle with the crowd. Except that Nick must have surprised the thief...

Returning to the rectory several hours later, Father found that Emma had prepared a supper of cold cuts and potato salad. But when he sat down at the table he had no appetite. He sighed gloomily: he'd been so mistakenly convinced when he started out this afternoon that he would find someone who would give him a clue, a bit of information that would lead him to the person who had knifed Nick LoVarco. None of this would have happened, he reflected bitterly, if it hadn't been for the terrible long siege of unrelieved heat and oppressive humidity; that's what had driven so many of his peaceful, law-abiding people into the streets, easy prey for troublemakers.

"Aren't you going to eat Father?" Emma demanded from the doorway.

"First things first," Father replied sharply, annoyed by the interruption to his train of thought. Then, seeing the clouded look on Emma's face, he sat down reluctantly and put a little food on his plate. But he couldn't get the words he'd just uttered out of his mind: first things first...

The priest gave a sudden start, causing the potato salad he'd been about to pop into his mouth to slither off his fork. But he didn't even notice it as he got up from the table, eased his arthritic shoulders into his wrinkled suit-coat, and then, despite the heat, hurried from the rectory to police headquarters.

Little wonder he hadn't been able to make head or tail of the puzzle, he scolded himself. He'd failed to put first things first. And the thing that came first, in this case, was not a thing at all but a person: Angel Flores.

"Why they keep me here, Father?" Angel demanded anxiously as he sat gripping the arms of a chair in Big Tom Madigan's office. "I swear I not do it. I swear! So why they keep me?"

"Well now," the pastor asked with a reassuring smile. "Didn't you yourself tell me that you were afraid for your life? That you wanted protection?"

The boy looked at him wide-eyed, unblinkingly.

"So it's only reasonable to have you here out of harm's way, wouldn't you say?"

"Okay, maybe," Angel admitted. "If you say, Father."

The priest waited a minute before he continued. "I'd like you to tell me again, lad, about yester-

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day—when you were playing stickball."

A deep glow of pride shone in Angel's large dark eyes. "I play good. Get two hits."

"That's fine," Father encouraged him. "Now then, about that knife with your name carved on it—are you sure you had it in your pocket while you were playing?"

Angel nodded emphatically. "Sure I sure. I always have it."

"And when did you notice that you didn't have it?"

"After game. I feel in my pocket—it gone."

"You looked around for it?"

"All around, but I do not find."

"I suppose the other lads admired it," Father remarked, thinking to himself that undoubtedly quite a few of them had knives of their own.

"Oh, yes—you bet, Father." Again a glow lit up the boy's eyes. "They jealous. Nobody have one so good."

Father gazed thoughtfully at his young parishioner. "Do you think maybe one of them—?" He left the question dangling.

"Find and steal? No, Father," Angel said with a vigorous shake of his head. "If any kid dare I lick him good."

The priest was ready to drop this seemingly fruitless line of questioning when another thought occurred to him. "Did you happen to notice anybody watching you play?"

Angel shrugged. "*Si*, some always watch."

"Who?"

"That big blond guy. What his name again? Ah—Nils Pedersen. And Tony Scalaro," Angel continued with a disdainful wave of his hand. "He always there—start to finish—telling us how to play, coaching. He think he know so good. Hah!"

"Anyone else, lad?"

"Oh, yes, my friend Orlando Garcia. He always watch too. And..." Angel hesitated, then shrugged again. "Maybe others, but I not remember."

The pastor nodded; then, after a few comforting words to the boy, he departed. The information Angel had just given him did not surprise him in the slightest. The three he had mentioned were of a kind: school dropouts, lazy, shiftless troublemakers who had nothing better to do with their time than watch younger boys play ball. Well, he told himself as he stepped out into the searing heat, it would do no harm to have a talk with them. Maybe one of the three had seen the knife drop from Angel's pocket and could name the person who had picked it up. Again, despite the heat, he hurried.

Nils Pedersen lived on the third floor of a time-scarred building which also housed Barney's Pool Parlor. Knowing this, Father Crumlish had a strong hunch

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where he'd find his young parishioner at this hour of the evening.

"I understand you were watching the stickball game yesterday afternoon," Father said after Pedersen reluctantly left the pool table and joined him.

"Anything wrong with that, Father?"

The pastor ignored the youth's belligerent tone. "Angel Flores' knife dropped out of his pocket during the game. Somebody picked it up and I thought you might know who—" He broke off as Pedersen gave him a knowing leer.

"Aw, c'mon, Father," Nils said. "You don't really believe that little punk's story?"

"I do, indeed," Father replied in a firm voice. "And why shouldn't you?"

"Me?" The leer broadened. "I wouldn't believe any of his kind, not for a min—"

"That's enough!" the priest thundered. "I'll not have you talking like that about a decent people... Now then," he resumed after he had regained his composure, "somebody picked up that knife and if you know who it was I want you to tell me."

"I already told you," Pedersen said sullenly. "I didn't see any knife fall out of the kid's pocket, and I don't believe it did."

Father gave him a long searching look, then he turned from him, sighing, and went on his way. His Irish luck was with him: he'd traveled less than three blocks when he caught sight of Orlando Garcia.

"Hi, Father!" Garcia, a slight wiry youth, greeted the priest with a wide smile. "You sure cool it last night, no? I think there be no more trouble now—"

"It's the stickball game you were watching yesterday that I'm interested in," Father said, cutting him off.

Garcia looked surprised. "Why that?"

Quickly Father explained his interest in the game, as he had to Nils Pedersen. "So if you know who picked up Angel's knife I want you to tell me," he concluded.

"Sure, if I see I tell," Orlando said. "Angel—he good kid. My friend! But I watch whole game and I not see nobody pick up knife."

Again, as he had with Pedersen, Father stared intently at Garcia, wondering if he was telling the truth. But this time he put his wonderment into words.

"I know how you lads feel about squealers," he said. "But if you're keeping the truth from me—shielding somebody—you're doing Angel a terrible injustice."

Dramatically Garcia raised his arm. "I swear, Father! I see nothing, nothing!" Once more Father Crumlish sighed disappointedly and then continued on his way.

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He was out of breath, the collar of his rabat clinging wetly to his neck, by the time he rang the bell of the second-floor rear apartment where Tony Scalaro lived with his Aunt Rosa.

His luck was still with him: young Scalaro himself opened the door. The tall dark-haired boy was visibly disconcerted by the pastor's unexpected visit and Father realized why: Tony thought he was going to get another tongue lashing, another lecture about being a dropout. The priest was sorely tempted to accommodate him, but since his mission tonight was of a different nature he decided to forego that duty.

"I hear you're quite a stickball coach," he remarked casually as he seated himself in a broken armchair. Tony's features relaxed and he reverted to his usual boastful, self-important manner. "I give the kids some pointers," he said airily. "But if they're too dumb to take an old pro's advice it serves 'em right to lose."

"But I heard that Angel Flores' team played pretty well yesterday," Father said.

"Nah!" Tony made a thumbs-down gesture. "They lost again —three to two—like they always lose. If they'd only played like I told 'em—" He broke off with an exasperated grunt and lit a cigarette.

"Well, since you were paying such close attention to the game," Father said confidently, "I'm sure you saw Angel's knife drop out of his pocket and can tell me who picked it up."

For a moment Scalaro regarded the pastor appraisingly; then he grinned, a wise, know-it-all look on his face. "I getcha, Father," he said. "You figure somebody grabbed Angel's shiv and used it on Nick LoVarco."

"I had that in mind," the priest conceded.

"Sorry!" Tony shook his head. "Like you just said, I had my eyes on the game from start to finish. But if the kid lost his knife and somebody grabbed it I missed the action."

Father Crumlish got to his feet and walked to the door. Then he turned. "I hope you've told me the truth, Tony," he said.

Scalaro threw up his hands. "What's to lie about? I've got nothing against the Flores kid—" He paused and frowned. "Except he's a lousy stickball player."

At age twelve, red-haired, freckle-faced Frankie Crumlish had left his native Tralee, County Kerry, to come to America and study for the priesthood, and almost immediately discovered the twin American miracles of hot dogs and baseball. Joyfully he joined the Faithful.

Nowadays, due to his sensitive stomach and loose dentures, Father Crumlish couldn't recall the last

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time he'd tasted a hot dog. But, as for baseball, it was doubtful that the Giants ever had a more devoted fan, or Willie Mays a more avid admirer.

Thus, tonight, although he was weary and discouraged when he returned to the rectory, he turned on the TV set in the hope of hearing how the Giants had fared in their afternoon game. Again he was lucky; a sportscaster was interviewing Willie Mays.

"Well, Willie," the interviewer said, "how about that home run of yours in the bottom of the ninth that enabled the Giants to come from behind and win the game?"

Mays replied modestly that he was glad he could do it for the team. He was grinning broadly, his eyes shining with pride.

So Mays had done it again, Father thought happily, and just in the nick of time—

"God bless us!" he exclaimed out loud. That look of pride in Willie's eyes: he had seen one just like it only a few hours ago. For some minutes he sat unmindful of the TV proceedings. Then abruptly he switched off the set, went to the phone, and called Big Tom Madigan.

"Tom," he said, "could you be doing me a favor?" And then quickly, because he knew that Madigan was always on guard when his pastor asked a favor: "I'd like to have a few words with Angel Flores." It was several minutes before the policeman acceded to the request and Angel came to the phone.

"Now, lad," Father said, "I'd like to ask you a question." He asked it, Angel answered, and the priest nodded in satisfaction. "All right," he said, "now you can put Lieutenant Madigan back on the wire."

Father Crumlish walked into Big Tom Madigan's office a little later and saw that the policeman had acted on his suggestion to pick up Tony Scalaro for questioning.

"Am I glad to see you, Father!" Tony exclaimed by way of a greeting. He made a scornful gesture toward Madigan who was seated grim-faced behind his desk. "Would you believe that the dumb cops are trying to finger me for knifing Nick LoVarco?" He chortled, sat back in his chair, the usual smug expression on his face. "Well, now *you* tell 'em, Father," he said. "Tell 'em just what I told you—that I don't know nuthin'."

"That's exactly what you told me, Tony," Father replied. "But if I remember correctly, you also told me that you saw the stickball game yesterday from start to finish."

"Yeah—" Suddenly there was a wary look on Tony's face. "That's right—"

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"Is it?" The pastor's tone was icy. "Then why didn't you see Angel get his second hit in the bottom of the last inning, batting in two runs and making the final score four to three?"

Scalaro's jaw dropped as he stared in wordless dismay at the priest.

"I've a notion why," Father said. "Just before that you noticed Angel's knife drop out of his pocket and the only thought in your head was to grab it and get away."

"Hey—wait, Father!" Scalaro protested. "I didn't—"

"Don't lie to me again!" Father shook a warning finger in Tony's face. "And don't tell me that you didn't intend to rob Nick LoVarco."

Madigan spoke up. "A robbery that could result in a murder charge against you."

"Murder?" The color drained from Scalaro's face.

Big Tom nodded coldly. "If LoVarco dies you stand to spend most if not all the rest of your life behind bars."

Abruptly the boy's defensive facade collapsed. "I—I didn't mean no harm to Nick," he said through quivering lips. "I just saw a chance to snatch a good hunk of meat, that's all. And if he hadn't caught me and started to holler I wouldn't have—"

He broke down and began to cry. As he did, the telephone on Madigan's desk rang. Big Tom picked up the receiver, listened intently, and then hung up.

"Scalaro," he said sharply. "I've got news for you."

Tony looked up, trying to fight back the tears.

"You're lucky," Madigan said. "I just got a report from the hospital. The doctors say LoVarco is going to live."

"Thanks be to God!" Father Crumlish murmured.

Madigan motioned to the uniformed policeman who was stationed behind Scalaro's chair. Before the boy was escorted out of the room, the pastor placed a hand on his shoulder. "It's going to be bad for you, Tony," he said, "but not as bad as it might have been. And remember, it's never too late to ask the good Lord to help you mend your ways."

"What put you on to him, Father?" Big Tom asked when he and the priest were alone.

"Willie Mays."

"What?"

"I saw Willie on TV tonight," Father said. "He was being interviewed about the home run he made today in the bottom of the ninth inning that won the game for the Giants, and there was such a look of pride in his eyes..."

"So?"

"I remembered there was the same look in Angel's eyes when he told me he got two hits yester-

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day. And then I began to wonder why the lad was so proud if what Scalaro had told me was true—that Angel's team had lost. Only if Angel's team had won, and only if Angel, like Mays, had at least helped his team win, would the boy have glowed with such pride. So it was a good bet that Tony Scalaro had lied."

Madigan chuckled. "You're in the wrong business, Father," he said. "You could make detective first grade easy. And if you need a reference, just call on me."

Not much later, St. Brigid's pastor wearily climbed the flight of rickety stairs leading to his bedroom. He was terribly tired, stickily hot, and he was ready to admit (a rare concession) that he was getting old. But he had two consolations: Nick LoVarco would be coming to the rectory in a month's time with another tasty rib roast, and his arthritis was acting up.

Father was grateful for the former, but he was even more grateful for the latter. From past experience he knew very well that when his creaking joints began to throb with excruciating pain it was a signal that the weather was about to change...

In the middle of the night the priest turned over in his bed and was jolted wide-awake by the pain that knifed through his shoulder. But then he heard the rain drumming down on the rooftops, streets, and sidewalks of his parish. A cooling breeze sifted in through his bedroom window and, despite his pain, Father Crumlish snuggled down and smiled. With God's help, he told himself, it was the end of his long hot summer.

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a FRANCIS QUARLES detective story by

JULIAN SYMONS

first publication in the United States

"Francis Quarles sometimes closed his eyes because he was sleepy and often because he was bored. Once, however, he solved a murder case by closing his eyes."

Resist that opening paragraph—if you can...

CAN YOU FIND THE ACE?

by JULIAN SYMONS

FRANCIS QUARLES SOMETIMES closed his eyes because he was sleepy and often because he was bored. Once, however, he solved a murder case by closing his eyes.

The victim was an unquestionably odd old lady named Jenny Adams, who lived with her niece on Highgate Hill in a house full of bric-a-brac. She was a great collector of all sorts of Victoriana, from peepshows to mother-of-pearl card cases, and she had a passion also for novelties that commemorated any historical occasion, or any visit she had paid to a particular place. Her drawing room was full of heavy mahogany furniture, sideboards, tallboys, weighty armchairs. It was decorated with trinkets made to celebrate Queen Victoria's jubilee, the relief of Mafeking, the end of the Boer War, and every subsequent public event in British history. The mementoes of her personal travels included ashtrays from Brighton, a stick of rock made in porcelain from Edinburgh, variously colored sands from Alum Bay, and a seaweed picture from Penzance.

It was in her drawing room that Jenny Adams was found dead. She had been struck on the head with one of her own treasures, a small statue of Psyche that had an inscription on the base: "Purchased by me on the way home after a memorable visit to Cheddar Gorge, August 1911. Jenny Adams."

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Francis Quarles was interested in the case because he had known Jenny Adams slightly, and had felt some respect for her as an old lady in the true tradition of English eccentrics. He was a little surprised, nevertheless, to receive a telephone call from her niece Rosa Spade asking him to come out to Highgate. Rosa, a cool, gray-faced woman in her early fifties, offered him a considerable sum of money to work on the case and find the murderer. With the utmost calmness she told him that she was herself one of the suspects.

"Aunt Jenny was well off, you know, and the three of us come into quite a bit of money under her will. We all knew that, too. I can see why they think that one of us must have done it. In fact, I have little doubt that one of us did."

"You mention three of you. Who are the others?"

"My brothers, Charles and Deverell Spade. We were Aunt Jenny's nearest relatives, and her will divides the money equally between us." She made a contemptuous gesture round the drawing room in which they sat. "Even with all the money she wasted on this junk there was a lot left."

"You didn't like your aunt," Quarles said. It was a statement, not a question.

Rosa Spade smoothed her skirt over her knees. "I lived with her a long time. To you she was a nice old lady, to me she was an autocrat who insisted on having her own way about everything. I won't pretend that I'm sorry she's dead, but I didn't kill her, and I don't like being suspected of murder."

"What about your brothers?"

"Charles runs a little engineering firm, Deverell owns a bookshop. They're always hard up, and the money will be a blessing to both of them. Neither of them got on very well with Aunt Jenny, but Charles came to dinner once a week. Deverell had a row last time he came, and hasn't been near the house for a year."

She added with her alarming coolness, "I may as well tell you that none of us has an alibi for the time of the murder on Tuesday evening. I'd gone out to the cinema, Charles went to see a friend who wasn't at home, and Deverell was buying some books from a man who lives in Hampstead and could easily have called in here." She smiled grimly. "It's rather like the three-card trick, Mr. Quarles. Can you find the ace?"

Quarles stared at her. "More than one murderer has tried a bluff by hiring me as an investigator. If I take on this job I shall carry it through to the end."

"That's just what I want, Mr. Quarles."

She left him alone in the draw-

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ing room, and he wandered among all the oddities it contained, wondering at the acquisitive instinct of human beings. Was it true that Jenny Adams had wasted her money, that she had bought only junk? She had lacked taste certainly—Quarles shuddered at the modern imitations of old Toby jugs, the needlework pictures, the model of Tower Bridge made in walnut shells—but there were pleasant things among the rubbish.

The mother-of-pearl card cases set in a little alcove, for instance, the Staffordshire dogs, some pleasant water colors that looked as if they might be by Morland, the Eric Ravilious mug that commemorated the coronation of George VI, and the Richard Guyatt mug for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the second. The two mugs stood on the mantelpiece, one on either side of a hideous plaster Pekingese dog.

Quarles stayed there half an hour, fidgeting with the antimacassars on the backs of chairs, poking about among work baskets, examining the chair in which Jenny Adams had been sitting when she was struck down. He could not have said what he expected to find. In fact, he found nothing.

Quarle's friend, Inspector Leeds, confessed himself puzzled. "The old lady knew her murderer. Must have let him in, or else he had a key. It was one of those three all right, but which one? They inherit about twenty thousand apiece, and both the brothers need it badly. Rosa doesn't, but she might just have got tired of the old lady and had a row with her. No prints on the little statue, no cigarette butts lying about, no bloodstains on any of their clothing that I've seen. They had equal motives, they had equal opportunity—and I haven't found one of them out in a lie yet."

Quarles went to see Charles Spade in the shabby offices of the Spade Motor and Dynamo Company. Charles was red-faced, and slightly sodden with whiskey.

"You're trying to find out the truth about poor old Aunt Jenny, eh? Rosa told me she'd engaged you. I wish you luck—it was a dirty murdering swine that killed her."

"When did you last see your aunt?"

Charles Spade's boiled blue eyes looked shrewdly at Quarles. "Couple of days before she died. Went to dinner once a week regularly, just to see the old lady. Gave me the shivers a bit, mark you—all that old furniture. Solid of course, but I like something a bit brighter myself. Then the stuff in that drawing room, mugs and jugs and dogs and pictures—you wouldn't believe all the stuff she bought at the coronation with the Queen's name or picture on it.

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Ashtrays, cups and plates and saucers, and I don't know what else. Of course it was her own money, but it seemed a waste."

"You were afraid the money would all be spent before it could come to you?" Quarles suggested smoothly.

"What's that? I didn't need the money. This is a flourishing business." Charles Spade looked round him, and obviously thought this a hopeless thesis to maintain. "Well, perhaps I am hard up, but I didn't murder the old girl."

Deverell Spade looked very much like his sister Rosa, but lacked her appearance of gray rocklike determination. His manner was almost gay as he swept the dust off a stool in a room at the back of the Spade Bookshop.

"Rosa told me you were coming, Mr. Quarles, and I'm delighted to meet you. Let me be absolutely frank right from the start. I hated Aunt Jenny; the last time I went to the house I had a flaming row—that was a year ago and I'm frightfully hard up. Running a second-hand bookshop is a good way of losing money. But in spite of that I didn't kill her, and I'm even rather sorry she's dead. Have a cup of tea?"

"You haven't seen your aunt for a year?"

"Very nearly. This is November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty-three, and I saw Aunt Jenny just before last Christmas. Since then we've had no communication of any kind." Deverell Spade sipped China tea delicately. "She really was a character, my aunt, and I thought that Victorian room of hers was great fun. Good things and rubbish mixed up higgledy-piggledy together, just like the best sort of antique shop."

"I saw some water colors that looked as if they might be Morlands."

Deverell bounced up and down with excitement. "They *are* by Morland, I'm sure of it—and she picked them up for ten bob the lot. But do you know, I don't believe she rated them any higher than her seaweed pictures. And those two nice mugs, the Ravilious and the Guyatt, with that monstrous plaster Pekingese between them, did you ever see such an extraordinary contrast as that?" He prattled on gaily for half an hour until Quarles took his leave.

Back in the office Quarles was teased by a feeling that the solution of the case lay in something that related to Jenny Adams' Victorian drawing room. He leaned back in his outsize revolving chair, put his feet on the desk, and closed his eyes. There appeared before him that room, slowly recreated by the eye of the mind, and he traversed it like a pan-

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ning camera, lingering occasionally on details.

Seaweed pictures, Morland water colors, presents from Brighton, Eastbourne, Edinburgh, solid sofas, ample armchairs, Revilious and Guyatt mugs with the plaster Pekingese between them, peepshows, Toby jugs, card cases, and fifty other objects passed slowly before him, and then merged into a bewildering kaleidoscope of forms and colors.

It was nearly two hours before Quarles opened his eyes. When he did so he said, "Of course," and telephoned Inspector Leeds. He had found the murderer.

The Inspector accompanied Quarles on his second visit to the Spade Bookshop. Deverell Spade received them pleasantly, but with some bewilderment. Quarles explained that he wanted to verify something Deverell had told him.

"You saw your aunt for the last time just before Christmas?"

"That's right."

"You've had no communication with her since then?"

"None."

"And you thought the plaster Pekingese dog looked ridiculous between the Ravilious and Guyatt mugs?"

"Yes. But what is all this, an inquisition on taste?"

The Inspector read over the formula of arrest. Deverell protested.

"But what have I said to suggest I had any connection with this ghastly crime? And what has the plaster Pekingese got to do with it?"

"The Pekingese—nothing," said Quarles. "But the mugs—a great deal. They show that you lied when you said you hadn't been in your aunt's house recently."

Deverell was pale. "Prove it."

"With pleasure. Richard Guyatt's mug was designed for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second. It was not on sale until shortly before the Coronation, which took place on June the second. You knew that one of those mugs stood on your aunt's drawing-room mantlepiece. How could you possibly have known that if you hadn't been inside her house since last Christmas?"

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a NEW Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Nick Velvet, you will recall, is a unique criminal: he steals "only the unusual, the bizarre, the worthless." In this, his fifth recorded adventure, Nick is hired (at his standard $20,000 fee) to steal the tickets from the box office of a Broadway theater. Not too unusual, you would say, not too bizarre or even too worthless. But—suppose they were the tickets for a Broadway show that had been closed for two months? Ah, that makes it an appropriate assignment for Nick Velvet, the choosy crook, the discriminating thief . . .

THE THEFT OF THE WICKED TICKETS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

NICK VELVET'S MEETING WITH Roscoe Fane took place on a 35-foot yacht anchored off a beach near the tip of Long Island. It was an area of wealth and leisure where yachts were large and girls' bathing suits small, where nobody hurried in August unless it was to a bank or an afternoon cocktail party.

Nick felt out of place on Roscoe Fane's yacht, not solely because he was the one person on board without a bathing suit. He felt rather that this was another world, and that these people should be his victims rather than his employers. He even found himself imagining what it would be like to steal this very yacht, complete with crew, and sail away to the West Indies.

Nick Velvet was a thief, of course, as even the police knew. But he stole only the unusual, the bizarre, the worthless. His fee was $20,000—a sum calculated to discourage the cranks and crackpots who occasionally sought his services. There were only a few men—like Roscoe Fane—who could afford him, and when they

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called he came and listened.

"There's a Broadway play called *Wicked,*" Roscoe Fane began, shifting in his deck chair until the afternoon sun struck his bronze chest. "My son, William, is the producer. He's only twenty-eight, and *Wicked* was his first Broadway show. He'd opened it off-Broadway last winter, and then decided to try it uptown."

Nick Velvet nodded. He didn't follow the theater closely, but he remembered reading something about *Wicked* a few months back. It dealt with an outbreak of sexual promiscuity among British cricket players, with the title a pun on the cricket term *wicket.*

"Just what is it you want me to steal?" he asked Roscoe Fane.

The yacht rocked gently as the afternoon breeze began to grow over the water. Fane scratched his tanned bald head and answered, "The tickets. I want you to steal all the tickets from the box office."

"That shouldn't be difficult," Nick said. "But why should you try to disrupt your own son's show?"

"You're not paid to ask questions, Mr. Velvet. Besides, the theft of the tickets will in no way disrupt the show. You see, *Wicked* closed at the beginning of summer, back in June."

Nick leaned forward. "Let me see if I've got this straight. You're going to pay me $20,000 to steal the tickets for a Broadway show that's been closed for two months?"

Roscoe Fane nodded. "That's correct."

Nick smiled and stood up. Fane did not rise. "I accept the assignment, sir. It should prove to be one of my most interesting jobs."

It was hot in Manhattan the following day, and the softness of the asphalt beneath his feet made Nick appreciate for the first time the previous afternoon's cooling sea breezes aboard Roscoe Fane's yacht. New York was no place to be in August heat. It only made Nick wish for the shaded porch at Gloria's house, where he liked to rest between assignments. Those were the only places to be on a hot August afternoon—on a millionaire's yacht or a shaded small-town porch.

It was a Wednesday, and the midweek matinees had brought the usual number of suburban matrons into Manhattan. Nick watched them for a time, then strolled into one of the store-front ticket agencies on Times Square.

"Show called *Wicked?*" he asked.

"*Wicked* closed in June," the young man behind the counter told him. "But I can give you a couple of good seats for *She's a Sinner!* Great little musical. Very popular with the convention crowd."

"No. Thanks, anyway."

Nick strolled down Broadway

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to 42nd Street, taking in the shabby bookstores that seemed to multiply with each of his visits, the identical movie houses with their sex-and-sin marquees, the orange-drink stands cluttered with sweaty, camera-toting tourists.

The production of *Wicked* had played for three months at the 41st Street Playhouse, but the advent of the summer season had proved too big a hurdle for a show about the British game of cricket, even spiced with more than a little sex. The theater, as Nick approached it, still carried the marquee signs for *Wicked*—though there was already a stand-up sign by the lobby door proclaiming: *Opens September 15th—"Legman in Love"—Tickets Now On Sale at the Box Office Inside.*

Nick paused across the street and studied the line of doors. The place was probably empty except for the ticket seller handling the new show. If the *Wicked* tickets had not yet been destroyed it would be a simple enough task to enter the theater and find them, probably still wrapped in their packages. It would be the easiest $20,000 he'd ever picked up.

Then he hesitated in the act of lighting a cigarette. A young man with a neatly trimmed beard paused in front of the theater and glance up at the *Wicked* marquee. He studied it a moment and then entered, without seeming to notice the smaller sign for *Legman in Love.* Nick crossed the narrow street and walked casually past the glass doors. The young man was at the box-office window, completing a transaction; a moment later he left the theater, examining a pair of tickets.

"Pardon me," Nick said to him. "Is the box office for *Wicked* open now?"

The young man eyed Nick with a hint of suspicion, then answered, "Sure. Right in there."

Nick opened the glass door and stepped into the sudden chill of the air-conditioned lobby. He walked up to the lighted box office where a white-haired man in his sixties was sorting stacks of pink and purple pasteboard tickets.

"You selling tickets?" Nick asked him.

"Sure am. How many, and what night?"

"How about tonight's performance of *Wicked?*"

The man frowned at the stack of pasteboards. "I'm just selling for *Legman in Love.*"

"But I understood I could get tickets to *Wicked* here too," Nick insisted.

"Yeah? Who told you that?"

"The kid with the beard who just left."

The white-haired man seemed to relax a little. "We've got a few left."

"How much?" Nick asked.

"They're twofers. Two-for-ones, half-price tickets." The man flip-

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ped through the pile. "Only two dollars each. Best bargain on Broadway."

"But I thought the show had closed. Has it reopened?"

Now the man was eyeing him with open suspicion. "Look, mister, the tickets are half price—take 'em or leave 'em."

"But if the show is closed, what sort of bargain is that?"

A girl had entered and stood waiting behind Nick. "Make room for the cash customers," the man growled.

"All right" Nick answered meekly. He moved aside with a slight bow to the girl, a striking blonde wearing a powder blue minidress and dark stockings over a pair of wonderful legs.

Then he went back out to the heat of 41st Street, feeling just a bit like Alice at the bottom of the rabbit hole.

The blonde girl in the blue minidress left the theater and walked quickly along 41st Street to Broadway. She turned left and headed downtown without a backward glance. After three blocks she turned into a little coffee shop on the corner.

Nick Velvet strolled in behind her and took a seat at the counter two stools away. He ordered a glass of iced coffee, because it sounded cool, and waited in silence until it arrived. Then he glanced casually at the girl and remarked, "Did you get your tickets?"

She looked him up and down, apparently approved of what she saw, and said, "You were ahead of me in line."

"That's right. But I didn't get any tickets out of that guy."

"Oh."

"You bought some?"

"Yes."

"To *Wicked*?"

A hesitation, but a brief one. "Yes."

"I understood it was closed."

"I wouldn't know. I just picked them up for a friend."

He sipped his iced coffee and said, "My name's Nick Velvet. I'm in real estate."

More silence, and then she replied, "Norma Cantell. I do a little acting off-Broadway."

"Oh?" He picked that up at once. "I understand that *Wicked* had a successful off-Broadway run."

"Fairly successful. I think Bill made a mistake moving uptown with it, though."

"Bill?"

"Bill Fane, the producer."

"I believe I know his father, Roscoe."

"Bill doesn't talk much about his family."

"You know him well?"

"I see him at parties. I've never worked with him."

"Is he in New York now?"

She nodded. "He's lining up a director and cast for a new off-

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Broadway play. This is the time of year for casting."

"I'd like to meet him," Nick said, "since I know his father."

She gave him another quick inspection. "Actually, there's a little party at a friend's apartment tonight. I'm pretty sure Bill Fane will be there. Would you like to come?"

"I certainly would!"

She scribbled an address on a piece of notepaper. "It's an apartment just off Washington Square on Fourth Street. Come any time after nine."

"You're sure it's all right?"

"Of course. These Village parties just sort of grow. Just say you're a friend of mine. You are, aren't you?"

Nick returned her smile. "I sure am."

That evening, shortly after eight o'clock, Nick mingled with the theater crowds and walked down to the 41st Street Playhouse. He didn't know exactly what he expected to find—perhaps a threater full of phantoms watching a phantom production. But there was no one outside, and all the doors were locked. The only light came from the box office in the lobby where the white-haired man was no doubt totaling up the day's sales of tickets to *Wicked*, a show that had closed two months earlier.

It was nearly nine thirty when Nick Velvet arrived at the party, guided toward the end of his journey by the oddly unreal strains of a medieval ballad being played on a recorder. The apartment was large and crowded. It was almost devoid of furnishings, although a few psychedelic posters covered one wall and a bad modernistic painting hung on another. Nick suspected that the artist was probably one of the guests.

But just then he was more interested in the young man with the neatly trimmed beard who was playing the recorder. It was the same youth he'd seen at the theater that afternoon, buying tickets to *Wicked*.

"Isn't he good?" Norma Cantell said, coming up behind him.

"Hello! I didn't see you." The room already held about two dozen guests, and more were arriving. "He can certainly capture a medieval sound on that thing. Who is he?"

She motioned to the bearded youth, who stopped playing long enough to be introduced. "Nick Velvet, John Milton."

"Not the poet?" Nick asked, because in this group it seemed the thing to say.

"Not the poet," the young man agreed with a smile. He'd obviously heard the gag many times before.

Nick was about to say something else, but Norma Cantell tugged at his sleeve. "There's Bill Fane now, if you want to meet him."

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The man she led him to was obviously the center of attention, and he was dressed to fit the part. He was tall and handsome, with a little scar running along one cheek from some forgotten boyhood misadventure. Roscoe Fane had said his son was 28, but he might have passed for five years younger than that. There was something dynamic about him, something that pulled people—especially the young people—to him like a magnet. Something like the charisma that politicians and evangelists sought.

"Nick Velvet?" he replied to the girl's introduction. "I don't remember my father ever mentioning your name."

"Do you see much of him these days?" Nick asked, avoiding the implied question.

"Talk to him almost every day, just to see how he's feeling. He has a telephone hookup on his yacht."

Nick lit a cigarette. "Last time I saw him he was most interested in your show. The first one—*Wicked*."

"That's because he owns the theater it was in."

"On Forty-first Street? Is it still running there?"

Bill Fane shook his head. Already he seemed bored by the conversation and his eyes were scanning the room for recent arrivals. "No, we closed it in June."

"Someone said they were still selling tickets up there."

Fane's expression didn't change. "For *Wicked*? That's impossible. They have a new play coming into the theater next month—that's what they must be selling. Why would anyone buy tickets for a show that's closed?"

"I don't know," Nick admitted, but already the producer was mumbling an apology and moving away.

Nick picked up a drink at the improvised bar and wandered over to sit with John Milton. He waited until the young man had finished another selection on the recorder and then said, "You're quite good at that."

"It sounds better with a group," Milton said.

"Do you still have those tickets you bought for *Wicked*?"

"What tickets were those?"

"I ran into you this afternoon, leaving the Forty-first Street Playhouse. Don't you remember?"

"You must be mistaken," the bearded youth answered evenly. "I was getting tickets for *Legman in Love*. It opens next month."

"I see." Nick stared at his cigarette. "I'd heard from a couple of people that you can still get tickets for *Wicked*. Two dollars each."

Milton seemed ready to stick to his denial, but the atmosphere was friendly. "I guess the word's getting around," he said. He reached into a pocket for his wallet

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and produced two purple tickets—orchestra seats M101 and M103 for Friday night's performance. They'd been overprinted in red to show the new lower prices. "Don't know if I'll be able to go, though," he said with a smile.

"I passed the theater tonight. There was no performance going on."

Milton was suspicious again. He pocketed the tickets and said, "Then I won't miss anything if I don't get there." He picked up a glass of water and sipped it.

Nick sighed and moved away. He was getting nowhere with these people. They were all crazy—or else he was.

He went back to Norma Cantell. "Is Bill Fane still here?" he asked, unable to spot the producer in the growing crush.

"No. He left with some girl. He always does."

"Tell me something—honestly," Nick asked.

"If I can."

"Are you people supporting Fane in some way? Buying tickets to his non-existent show?"

"Of course not! What gave you that idea?"

Nick sighed and glanced over at John Milton. "Does he only drink water?"

"That's all. Just water."

Some space had been cleared and a few couples were dancing. The music was coming now from a stereo record player at the far end of the room, filling the place with the amplified throb of electric guitars.

"The man at the box office," Nick said. "Do you know him?"

She seemed surprised by his question. "I think his name is Thorne. He's a retired actor or something."

Nick had one more idea. "Is Bill Fane—or this Thorne—blackmailing you all, forcing you to make payments?"

"Don't be silly! I don't know what you're talking about."

He had to admit it *was* silly. Blackmail payments of two dollars at a time! But there had to be some explanation. "What goes on in that theater, Norma?"

"Get lost!" she said suddenly. "You're starting to bore me."

He watched her move through the guests and disappear into the kitchen to help the slim little girl who was apparently their hostess.

Nick stayed for another ten minutes without striking up any useful conversations. As he was leaving he saw John Milton still at a table alone. The bearded young man was staring at the two purple tickets to *Wicked*. As Nick went out the door he saw the youth shrug indifferently and drop the tickets into his half-empty water glass.

Nick Velvet was a thief and not a detective. He'd wasted too

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much time already, puzzling over the activities at the theater, and he decided the following day that his assignment must be carried out without further delay. He was being paid $20,000 to steal the tickets, not to discover the reason for their continued sale.

That night he was back at the theater, first checking the front doors to nake certain they were locked, then moving down the side alley to check the stage door. After a complete circuit of the theater he was convinced it was tightly locked—though a light still burned in the box office.

It was not yet midnight, but on 41st Street there was little after-theater traffic. He waited until some strollers passed from the Billy Rose Theatre in the next block, then went back down the alley to the stage door. Nick carried a small but impressive tool kit beneath his shirt. It took him only a few moments to open the common cylinder lock and enter the backstage area. He used a hooded flashlight to guide himself around coils of rope and discarded flats of scenery until he reached the auditorium portion of the building.

In the front a single light bulb still burned in the box office. If the white-haired Mr. Thorne was still there, he had to be lured away. Nick disliked violence, and he hoped to jump the man and tie him up without injury. He took a little rubber ball from his pocket and sent it boucing along the carpeted floor at the back of the orchestra, but the noise was too muffled. Nick tossed a penny against the wall, but still no one came out of the box office.

He remembered that once in Paris he'd lured a watchman with a faked phone call. Often theaters had pay telephones in their lounges. It took him only a minute to locate a phone booth and dial the number of the theater box office. Almost immediately he heard the phone begin to ring. He let it ring eight times before he broke the connection, satisfied at last that he was alone in the theater.

The box-office door stood half open and he pushed it the rest of the way, his eyes on the hundreds of little pigeonholes where the tickets were kept.

But the familiar purple ones were gone. Only the pink tickets for *Legman in Love* were visible.

He was all the way into the narrow confines of the cluttered box office before his foot hit a yielding softness on the floor. Nick looked down and saw the crumpled body of the white-haired Mr. Thorne. He'd been shot through the heart at close range.

Nick bent to examine the ancient Army Colt revolver half hidden by the body. There was little doubt it was the murder weapon. Its front sight was still tangled in the dead man's powder-burned

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jacket. A key ring was still in place on his belt.

Nick stood up, breathing hard. Someone had killed Thorne and beaten Nick to the tickets. It might be coincidence, or it might be a carefully laid plot to frame him for the murder.

He glanced around the cubicle, noting an open drawer beneath the grillework ticket window. The drawer was empty. He checked the cabinets to make certain the *Wicked* tickets were indeed gone, then returned to the darkened auditorium. He tried the six sets of outside doors leading into the lobby, but all were locked. From somewhere in the distance a siren began to grow louder. It might have been headed anywhere, but Nick couldn't wait to find out.

He left as he had come, through the stage door and into the alley.

The next morning, while threatening black clouds rolled along the horizon, Nick Velvet went back to Roscoe Fane's yacht. The bald-headed man was sitting as Nick had last seen him, facing the morning sun even though the dark clouds obscured it.

Nick drew up a canvas deck chair and sat down opposite the man. "I came back to report," he said quietly.

"You have the tickets?"

"No."

Rosco Fane's eyes widened. "You mean you failed? I hired you because you have the reputation of never failing."

A distant flash of lightning streaked the horizon, then died as the thunder rolled over them. "I failed in a sense," Nick admitted. "I failed to realize I was being set up for a frame."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the whole story of the tickets was a phony from the very beginning. They had no worth, there was nothing happening in that empty theater. And certainly tickets sold from the box office of a defunct show would attract too much attention. You just hired those people to buy them, and old Thorne to sell them, knowing my curiosity would be aroused. Then, last night when I broke into the theater, you arranged to get there first and murder Thorne."

"Why would I do that?"

"Oh, I'm sure you have a motive. He was an old actor, and you own that theater. I suppose there was something between you way back in the past. You did some careful planning to make me the fall guy, but you made one slip."

"And what was that, Mr. Velvet?"

"The theater was, for all practical purposes, a giant locked room. I checked every door before I entered, and all of them were locked. I went in by the stage door and later I checked the lobby doors from the inside. They were all

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locked too. Admitting that old Thorne could have opened a door for someone he knew, then how did the killer leave? Don't you see? He had to lock the theater behind him! It had to be locked when I reached it, so there'd be evidence of my break-in. The killer had to be someone *with a key to the theater!* You, as the owner, were the only person who not only had such a key but also knew what my plans were."

Roscoe Fane sighed and spoke to one of the crew. "The storm is moving closer. We'd better get inside." But he continued to sit in the deck chair, and after a moment he turned back to Nick. "Your reasoning is idiotic, Mr. Velvet. I never even knew Thorne was dead until you told me just now."

"You deny killing him?"

"Of course I deny it! Why would I go through this elaborate scheme just to frame you for a crime? And as for your locked-room theater, I can see you've spent very little time around them. A theater is one of the few buildings in the world which could never be a completely locked area. The murderer could easily escape from it without a key."

"What do you mean?" Nick asked, feeling a chill on his spine.

"My friend, anybody on earth can walk out of a locked theater without a key and still leave it locked behind him. He simply walks out of an Exit door. Every theater has them, and the fire laws require that they never be locked to someone inside the theater."

Nick Velvet sat staring at the bald man. He was speechless, baffled.

The crew member had reappeared now, pushing a wheel chair. "If you need any further evidence of my innocence," Roscoe Fane said, "I have been crippled for the past two years. It is almost impossible for me to walk, or to do much of anything besides sit in the sun and worry."

The man helped him into the wheel chair just as the first large drops of rain hit the deck. "Get out of here now, Velvet!" he growled. "And don't come back unless you bring those tickets!"

By the time Nick reached Manhattan the summer storm had struck the city with full fury. It had come in unexpectedly from the east, bringing with it a torrential rain that threatened for a time to deluge the midtown area. Nick stood in a doorway on Seventh Avenue, watching the rain sweep across the deserted pavement, wondering what to do next. He had never failed on an assignment, but he'd never been as close to failing as he was now.

He bought an afternoon paper and pried the soggy pages apart until he found a one-column account of Thorne's murder. The

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police figured it was a robbery killing, and the open stage door was mentioned. It was linked with a box-office holdup at another theater one month earlier, though the *modus operandi* of the two crimes were not alike.

Nick moved a few doors up the street during a temporary lull in the downpour. He watched a poster for some political rally swept away by the wind until it settled into a curbside puddle, then noticed the ink from it gradually discoloring the water. Not very good printing for an outdoor sign, he thought.

Shortly afterward, the rain pelting again, he managed to catch a taxi and headed for Greenwich Village to seek out the off-Broadway theater where Bill Fane was rehearsing his new play. The rain let up by the time he reached the place, and he found Fane without difficulty in a shabby little office of what had once been a garage and truck terminal.

"Nick Velvet?" the young man asked uncertainly. "Didn't I meet you at a party a couple of nights ago?"

"That's right," Nick confirmed.

"What can I do for you? I'm waiting for my director—"

"I came to warn you," Nick said earnestly. "About the tickets for *Wicked*. You took the wrong ones. And your father has the real ones."

Nervous, off guard for just an instant, Bill Fane shot a glance at the locked cabinet next to his desk. That was all Nick Velvet needed. Fane made a sudden dash for the cabinet, realizing he'd been tricked, but Nick was over the desk, toppling Fane to the floor.

This time he hoped he was right.

The morning was sunny, and Roscoe Fane was sitting on deck in his usual chair when Nick Velvet climbed over the railing. "Quite a change from yesterday," he said.

"I hope so," Roscoe Fane retorted. "I told you not to come back without those tickets."

Nick dumped the bulky package from under his arm and watched it split open as it hit the deck. Packets of purple pasteboards went tumbling across the smooth wood. "Exactly fourteen thousand six hundred and fifty tickets," he said. "And I've got another bundle in the rowboat alongside."

Roscoe Fane's eyes lit up. "I didn't think you'd fail me, Velvet. Even though you went off on the wrong tack yesterday."

"It's more than just the tickets now, of course. Your son killed that man Thorne."

"He admitted that?"

Nick nodded. "According to your son, the scheme was Thorne's idea. But of course your son was in on it. When I started asking questions at a party, Bill got scared.

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He went to Thorne the next night and wanted to take the tickets, call the whole thing off. Thorne pulled a gun from a drawer in the box office, they struggled over it, and it went off. I must say the evidence bears out your son's story. There was an open drawer, empty, and the gun was an old model more suited to box-office drawers than to premeditated murder. The weapon was still tangled up in Thorne's jacket, further confirming your son's story."

"Self-defense," the old man breathed.

"That's not for me to judge."

"How did you know my son was involved?"

"If it wasn't you it had to be him. You weren't going to pay me $20,000 for nothing. Besides, I stand by my theory that Thorne had to know the person he opened the theater door for."

"You know about the tickets?" Fane asked, gesturing toward them.

"I know. I should have deduced the truth much earlier. But just yesterday I saw the ink from a sign dissolving in a puddle, and then I remembered seeing a young fellow drop two of the tickets into a glass of water. I remembered the overprinting of the new prices —something Broadway houses never do, not even with twofers. I put those observations together and decided that the overprinting on the tickets might dissolve in water."

"Yes," Rosco Fane mumbled.

"Two dollars each. The going price right now for a single dose of LSD."

"I don't know what my son was thinking of."

"Believe me, he was thinking of the money, and so was Thorne. It wouldn't have worked with most drugs, but LSD can be injected into a sugar cube, or mixed with water, or impregnated in paper. LSD in the printing ink was a simple trick. Right in the heart of Manhattan the tickets could be sold publicly—and no one the wiser. The customers for the *Wicked* tickets used some simple signal to tell Thorne what they wanted. Everyone else got tickets to *Legman in Love.* I flustered him by asking for the *Wicked* tickets outright, but I imagine he was usually pretty careful. The whole thing was much safer, much more professional, than standing on a street corner with a package of sugar cubes that the police could spot at once. The customers took the tickets home, simply dropped them in a glass of water, drank it, and went on a trip."

"I have your money," Roscoe Fane said. "What about the tickets?"

Nick scooped up the bundles and began to toss them overboard. "Let the fishes have some fun," he said.

"I don't know what my son

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was thinking of," Roscoe Fane said again. "I don't know how Bill could have done it."

"You heard about it and hired me, hoping to put a stop to this thing before your own son was arrested."

"What about the murder charge?" Fane asked.

"I'll leave the two of you to work that out," Nick said. "But don't be surprised when you see him. I had to hit him a couple of times to get these tickets for you."

All the way back to shore Nick Velvet kept tossing packages of tickets to the invisible fish. But he felt as if he were polluting the entire ocean.

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The author, Roy Lester-Pond, is a Rhodesian, but his manuscript came from Durban, Natal, South Africa. He was 23 when he wrote "Give a Man Rope"—his 26th short-story attempt and his first sale. While at high school he worked as an attorney's clerk. Then, "under parental pressure," he went to Natal University to study for a Bachelor of Laws degree. But the thought of practicing law depressed him—he found that he was far more interested in, and satisfied by, creative work. So he became a copywriter in a large advertising agency in South Africa, and began to write fiction in his spare time.

We have a hunch that nothing will stop this young man from realizing his ambitions . . .

GIVE A MAN ROPE

by ROY LESTER-POND

I KNEW THAT THE GIRL IN THE reference room of the Public Library had identified me to the Security Police the moment she dropped the book. It slipped convincingly through her fingers and fell behind the counter with a sharp clap that made heads at the reading tables turn. I couldn't have been more startled if she'd turned a spotlight on me.

But skilled librarians like Liza didn't fumble.

For months I had been using her as an intermediary in the fight against the hated regime, slipping information into books for her to pass on to other links in the resistance chain. I had come to admire her efficiency.

There was another giveaway.

When the book struck the floor, one bowed head at the reading tables reacted with conspicuous restraint. Unlike the rest whose eyes glared at her, this man paid

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no attention to the unexpected noise.

Security Agent. So the game was up. What would happen next?

I looked at Liza. Busily straightening a pile of books on the counter, she pretended she hadn't noticed me. There was a sheen of perspiration under her eyeglasses. What on earth had made her sell out? Or had she been a plant all along? The questions in my mind died unanswered. Suddenly it really didn't matter.

Liza looked up and tacked a smile on her face.

"Good morning, sir. May I help you?" she said.

I heard a chair scrape behind me, heard footsteps approach. Should I run? I felt the prickle of fear under my skin. I didn't dare look. This was it. The end. I held my breath, waited for the Security Agent to grab my arm. It was the eternity that a condemned man knows before the trap door falls or the guns fire.

He came up alongside and stood at the counter a few feet away—the same man who had guarded his reactions so carefully when the book dropped. I caught a whiff of spicy cologne. From the corner of my eye I saw him place a book on the counter. He left it and began to page idly through a catalogue. I eased out a ragged lungful of air. I hoped he couldn't hear my heart piledriving.

"I'd like a book," I told Liza. I managed to give her details.

She was back with the book in a few moments. I took it to a table near the door and sat down to read, but I didn't see a word of print. Desperately I tried to balance my teetering wits on a knife edge of hope.

Why hadn't they arrested me right away? No evidence? *They* didn't need it; besides, they would presumably know I had the secret report on me. Why wait until I put it into the book? They were deliberately stalling, giving me rope. What for? To hang myself? Or trap someone else? Were they merely setting a watch on me for the present, hoping I'd lead them eventually to a bigger fish?

If that were the case I'd have to go through with the usual dropoff. I had to convince them I thought the ball was still in play.

When I judged the moment right I did my sleight-of-hand trick, slipped the envelope between the pages of the book, and returned the book to the counter.

I felt the Security Agent's eyes bore into my back.

I said a quiet goodbye to Liza and left.

Not too fast, I thought as I headed for the library entrance; he mustn't think there was any danger of losing me. If he did he might pounce. I came out blinking in the bright sunlight.

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Seconds later I heard him on the steps behind me.

I imagined he intended following me home. The Security Police would have no idea of my name or address. Not even Liza knew that. To her I was simply "Conrad"—a code name.

I turned in the opposite direction. There was just a chance I might lose him uptown.

It was a hot morning, with the pre-lunch hour traffic thickening fast. Where would be the best place to shake him off? I decided on a department store—there was one three blocks away. I wondered what he was thinking, his eyes riveted on my back. How did I look to him? Unsuspicious? Dangerous?

I crossed the street.

Two more blocks to go.

It occurred to me that my step might look too purposeful. I stopped to admire a set of golf clubs in a sports window. Three shops back my shadow found something irresistible in a lingerie display. I strolled on, imagining his relief. At the crossing I waited for the light to change.

I could see the department store now, up ahead. I timed it so that I reached the last crossing just before the light turned red, then darted across, the traffic sealing my escape.

Slowly, I thought—it mustn't look obvious. It took terrific discipline to stop myself from diving into the store. Casually I joined the stream of shoppers. I knew there were two entrances to the store, but the trick would be to leave through the same door.

I saw a rack with men's sports jackets on display. I picked one at random and before the salesman could approach, I slipped into one of the dressing cubicles, parting the curtain so that I could watch the entrance.

The Security Agent was closer than I expected, a tough-looking, barrel-chested man with dark eyes. I saw him scan the shop quickly, then move into the crowd.

I thought I had won.

I folded the jacket and come out of the dressing cubicle. I told the clerk the jacket was too small. Then I bolted for the street.

But I had underestimated the Security Police badly.

They followed me home.

I didn't know it at first. I was too busy congratulating myself and patting myself on the back; it looked as if the danger were over. The Security Police knew neither my name nor address—so I was safe. A few clever changes in my appearance and I would be ready to move on to another area and continue to work.

I was a fool to imagine they had set only one Security Agent on my tail. Probably there had been a car, walkie-talkies, and at least two other men in the background.

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It wasn't until the next day that I found out the truth.

Taking an enormous risk, I had gone to a park in the center of the city where I hoped to meet a contact and report developments before I left. The contact hadn't showed up. It was just as well.

The Security Police were watching every move I made.

When I got back I was sure. They had been through my apartment while I was out. The faint redolence of a spicy cologne still hung in the air. It was careless of them to send the same man who had followed me from the library. But it showed how confident they were.

They had made another mistake.

They had tampered with my telephone and let the tampering show. It was a very small mistake, but minutiae were my stock in trade. Sharing a stand with the telephone was a potted anthirium plant with large flat leaves. Like all green plants, the shiny surfaces of the leaves always faced the source of sunlight in the room. Now they were at a distinct angle to the window. The Security Agent had obviously moved the plant to get at the telephone and overlooked this small detail.

But it was too late to matter. It was the end of the line for me; they could pick me up whenever the wanted to.

I wondered dully what type of listening device they had fitted inside the telephone. A three-wire tap? No bigger than a coin, it could record telephone conversations; all outside numbers that were dialed, and pick up anything said in the room, transmitting it to a listener who could be anywhere in a half-mile radius.

With a sinking heart I went to the window. How many men were out there watching and waiting? Evidently they still hoped I would lead them to someone bigger than myself. I wondered how long it would be before their patience ran out and they decided to pull me in.

Escape was impossible now. Nothing could get past them. I felt like a slide under a high-power microscope.

I turned the problem over and over in my mind until my head ached; and the more I thought about it, the more I despaired. I even toyed with the idea of giving myself up; then I reminded myself what they would do to me before they leaned me up against a wall in the raw dawn light.

If only I could get past the men who were watching and listening, I could be across the frontier in hours. I glanced at the telephone, stared at it with the rapt concentration of a mind suddenly inspired.

The tapped phone. Of course!

It was a fantastic gamble, but it was my only weapon.

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I spent a few minutes thinking it out clearly. Then trembling with excitement I picked up the telephone receiver and dialed a number. I imagined the hidden ear in the telephone eagerly stirring.

There was a crackle of a lifted receiver and a prim woman's voice came on the line.

"Hello," she said. "Reference room, Public Library."

"Liza? Can you talk? It's Conrad."

I heard a sharp intake of breath. "You! What do you want?"

"Red alert," I said. "Listen carefully. I think the Security Police are on to me, so I had to warn you. Don't panic." I dropped my voice. "I'm not absolutely sure, so I have to find out. Tomorrow afternoon I'm supposed to meet my source, Eric. I can't afford to involve him—he's too big. I'd rather throw myself in the line of fire." I paused. "I'm going to make them show their hand."

"What?" she said, confused.

I spoke clearly and precisely into the mouthpiece. "This afternoon," I said, "I'm going to catch a train for the frontier. If the Security Police really are on to me, they're certain to make a move. If nothing happens and I see absolutely nothing, I'll get off the train before I reach the frontier and catch another train back. I'll put you in the picture when I return in the morning. Expect word from me."

The trick worked perfectly. There wasn't a Security Agent within miles.

As I had hoped, they realized they would lose more by following me—I was small fry. The prospect of netting my "source" was worth the gamble to them.

Suspicious, and still unable to believe my good luck, I got off the train a few miles ahead of the frontier and went the rest of the way on foot. My papers were in order, so crossing the frontier proved no difficulty. When I reached a town on the other side I sent a telegram to Liza.

THANK SECURITY FOR COOPERATION. GIVE A MAN ROPE AND HE WILL SKIP.

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In which Godfrey Bodkins (or Odds Bodkins, as he is better known) continues to devote his talents as a bookie (or Turf Accountant, as he prefers to be known) to the detection of crime.... It was an interesting and clever scheme that the Inspector from Scotland Yard proposed—how to trap the art thief who specialized in stealing Dutch paintings from British museums...

ODDS BODKINS AND THE DUTCH MASTER

by RICHARD CURTIS

AFTER MY INGENIOUS CONCLUsions enabled the police to solve the Featherstone murder case, a Scotland Yard investigator told me that if I devoted as much thought to doping human behavior as I do to that of horses, I would make a first-rate detective. Despite my limited interest in police work, however—and *that* occasioned strictly by self-concern—I don't seem to have chalked up too bad a record as a sleuth. Take the so-called Dutch Master case.

The Dichter Galleries off Little Creighton Street belong to that large number of mediocre art museums in London which are included in guide books only if the many other tourist features do not crowd it out of the listing. It is poorly endowed and displays an indifferent collection of works derivative of various Dutch schools—at least that's what I was told by Mr. Compton, a collector who occasionally drops by my betting shop to punt a few pounds on the ponies. The Galleries were founded over a century ago, but what with rising costs it's a mystery what has kept them functioning for the last few decades; same thing that has kept the rest of the country going, I suppose.

It did have one distinguished Vermeer to recommend it, however, and among those who found it worth the inconvenient trip was the gentleman who, one night in November, carefully removed it from its frame and made off with it. This was not difficult to accomplish, as the place was unguarded, its doors and windows

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were feebly fortified, and its alarm system was about as sturdy as the postwar pound.

That the thief was the same chap who had nicked, within the past six months, eight splendid Dutch paintings from the National Museum, the British Museum, two private estates, and a university gallery, there was little doubt. But art experts and Scotland Yard detectives were no closer to identifying him after the latest theft than they were after the first. After the last, however, mounting impatience with their progress seemed to crystallize. Museum directors, insurance agents, newspaper reporters, and the art-loving public at large demanded results at once or—well, no one knew quite what.

If you had told me, on the Thursday morning following the Vermeer theft, that I would become personally involved in the case, you could have received most attractive odds. But at noon my clerk Richard popped his head into my office, where I was going over my ledgers, to tell me there was a C.I.D. man outside. I don't know why my heart started thundering the way it did. Habit perhaps. Years before, when my bookmaking activities did not quite synchronize with Her Majesty's statutes, I had had some, shall we say, "interviews" with the police. But since then I'd been running a perfectly legitimate, licensed operation, paying scrupulous attention to each law that I couldn't circumvent with impunity.

In the seconds between Richard's announcement and the entrance of Inspector Elston, my mind roved over my recent peccancies in the hope of determining just which one had brought me to the attention of the authorities. I could not fix my attention on any single one long enough to prepare a defense, so I left it to my gifts for improvising to defend myself from whatever the Inspector had come to confront me with.

"Godfrey Bodkins?" The voice belonged to a tall fair-haired chap, boyish-looking and appealing, wearing a gray overcoat with collar turned up against the cold.

"Godfrey Bodkins, yes. Or 'Odds,' as my friends call me," I answered, summoning my most congenial manner.

"Peter Elston, Criminal Investigation Department. You needn't be alarmed. I've come to ask for your assistance."

"Always glad to help my friends at the Yard," I said, smothering a relieved sigh.

"Good. Have you been following these art thefts?"

"On and off. There was something about them in yesterday's *Express*. Treated you fellows rather shabbily, I thought. You're doing your best, now, aren't you?"

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"Yes, but we're under heavy fire. The Chief wants a lead and he doesn't care how he gets it."

"I'd be happy to tell you anything if I knew—"

"That isn't why I've come, Bodkins. You see, in our desperation a number of us proposed some rather unorthodox measures to pick up this thief's trail. One of them involved using a bookie, and someone suggested you."

"I did break a case for the Yard not long ago," I said—somewhat nonchalantly, I thought. "I suppose that's how my name came up—though I imagine," I added pointedly, "they referred to me as a 'turf accountant.'"

"Quite. Well, we believe the 'Dutch Master,' as the *Express* has taken to calling him, hasn't been able to fence the paintings and may be growing desperate for money. So one of us suggested a plan whereby a—ah—turf accountant would offer high odds that the thief would soon be apprehended. Say, in ten days. You would then observe all those who bet against your proposition—who bet, in other words, that the thief, would *not* be caught within ten days. It's just possible that the thief, or an accomplice, would take you up on the bet in the hope of winning a large amount of money, or at least enough to live on until the heat was off."

"Very shrewd," I said. "I would tip you off when someone placed a suspiciously large wager, and you'd trail him."

"That's the ticket." Inspector Elston pulled himself up and grinned. The plan had obviously been devised by him, and he could all but taste the citation they'd give him for the trap he had successfully set for the Dutch Master.

I turned the scheme over in my mind, looking for flaws. One possibility made me frown. "What if the fellow thinks I know too much, and decides—?" I made a pistol with my thumb and forefinger and dispatched poor Odds Bodkins with a click of the tongue.

Inspector Elston shook his head. "Very unlikely. You and your office will be under constant surveillance."

"I hope so. The other thing is, what if ten days go by and our man hasn't turned up? I'd have to pay winners out of my own pocket."

"We thought of that, and you needn't worry. Part of the reward money put up by the insurers has been set aside for this purpose, and you'll be promptly reimbursed out of it. In fact, if we do apprehend our thief as a result of this ploy, you'll be entitled to a substantial reward as well."

"Plus my winnings if we capture him within ten days?"

"Precisely. So you've nothing to lose and much to win. That kind

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of odds should appeal to any gambling man, I should think."

"Oh, they do, they do!" I answered without hesitation.

"Then we may count on you?"

"Yes, indeed. I should say ten-to-one odds ought to attract the bloke."

"That sounds about right. I'll arrange for an item to appear in tomorrow's papers. I'll be stationed in a flat across the street. As soon as a customer places a largish bet—say, anything over fifty pounds—phone me. I'll put a man on his tail straight away."

The next morning, in a column beside the news of the Dutch Master case, there was an item announcing that Godfrey ("Odds") Bodkins, Turf Accountant, was giving 10-to-1 odds in favor of apprehension within ten days. Bets would be accepted for five days. If the thief had not been captured by 5:00 p.m. on the second Monday from the date of the announcement, I would happily pay off all winners.

I had had one big reservation. What if my offer attracted a flood of bettors and none of them turned out to be, or to lead to, the thief? Would my backers be willing to pay out tens of thousands of pounds for nothing? Inspector Elston, ringing me up the next morning to tell me the phone number of the flat across the way, reassured me that it wouldn't happen. He said that most people would believe that when a bookmaker puts up odds that high he is betting on a sure thing. So they wouldn't bet against me.

His psychology turned out to be quite astute. I was swamped with phone calls and visits from reporters, fellow bookmakers, and customers all wanting to know what made me so sure the Dutch Master would be behind bars in ten days—but few were concerned enough to bet more than a few shillings saying I was wrong.

The most curious thing to happen was a visit from a man who represented himself to be from the Metropolitan Police. It was strange that he didn't know what was going on in his own system, and his rather furtive manner made me suspicious of him at once. So I told him nothing. He gave his name as Inspector Fedwell, and as soon as I had the opportunity I rang up Scotland Yard to check on him. They said yes, they did have such a person on their staff, and I drew the tentative conclusion that this was one of those cases where the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing. But I was still uneasy about him.

For two days only a few were willing to put money down against my challenge. Those bets that were wagered did not exceed a pound or two—nothing on the scale that Inspector Elston expected the thief to bet. Perhaps the

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Dutch Master was only sniffing at the bait.

On the third day I got a taker. A somewhat jowly individual wearing a dirty mackintosh entered my shop. He looked over his shoulder three or four times before stepping up to the counter. Then he said, "You the gent offering ten-to-one on that art theft thing?" I said I was. "What makes you so certain this Dutch Master chap is going to be caught?"

"Lay down a few quid and find out," I replied.

He puckered his mouth, then drew out of his trouser pocket a roll of banknotes. "Here's five hundred says he won't be nabbed." I gazed levelly at him. "Mister, you're on."

He gave his name as R. Taggart, and an address in Chelsea, both of which I assumed to be false. The instant he left I dialed the number that Inspector Elston had given me, and he said he was putting two plainclothesmen on Taggart at once. A few hours later the Inspector rang me back. "We have him under surveillance, but I'm fairly sure he's not our thief. If anything, he's the man's stooge. The Dutch Master will probably lie low until the bet is won. When he meets with Taggart to collect his winnings, we'll be right there to make the arrest."

The fifth day went by, and at closing time I put up an announcement that bets on the capture of the Dutch Master would no longer be accepted. Now I would have to wait, perhaps as long as five more days.

Except for Taggart's, all wagers had been paltry. The finger obviously pointed to him, but I wasn't completely satisfied. For one thing it went against my pride to lose my well-publicized bet—and I would surely lose it if the Dutch Master waited until the tenth day had ended before coming into the open. For another, that so-called police-officer, Fedwell, was on my mind. If I could confirm my suspicions about him I might emerge the hero.

So that evening I decided to pay a visit to Scotland Yard. And I learned quite a bit more than I'd bargained for.

On the evening of the ninth day Elston rang me up. "Taggart hasn't shown his hand yet. As I suspected, we'll have to wait till he's collected his money from you tomorrow evening. I'm certain that within hours after that he'll lead us to our man."

"Fine, sir. Too bad it doesn't look as if you'll be arresting him under the deadline."

"Yes, it is too bad, but the important thing is to get him. And of course you won't lose anything."

"Ah, yes," I said, somewhat ill at ease. "Ah—while we're on that topic I was wondering about—ah—the mechanics of refunding the

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moneys. I'll be paying out tomorrow on this bet."

Elston reassured me again. "I told you we'd reimburse you promptly."

"Yes. Well, sir, I was wondering if I might respectfully ask you to bring me a check in advance. It's just a business principle of mine, you understand."

"Oh, bother! Very well. I'll come by a bit before five tomorrow. What's the amount?"

I had the figure at hand. £575 had been bet—meaning a payoff, at 10-to-1, of £5750. I told Elston.

"I'll have it for you, but mind you save the chits so that I can account for every penny to the bookkeepers. They have business principles too, Bodkins."

All Friday afternoon I was as tense as a watchspring. Around 4:30 my shop grew a bit crowded as bettors who came to collect on the Dutch Master's imminent triumph joined the usual throng of punters collecting racetrack winnings at the end of the day. Time passed at a crawl, and at 4:55 Elston had still not appeared with my refund check, nor had Taggart arrived to collect on his bet.

But with four minutes left Elston arrived, smiling, and waved an envelope. He was just about to come to my counter when Taggart entered. Elston saw him and quickly stepped back, not wanting to be spotted. Taggart came over to my counter. I looked at Elston, who gave me a high sign instructing me to pay off Taggart.

It was then that I motioned to Inspector Fedwell, and before anyone had an inkling of what was going on, he and six plainclothesmen had Elston and Taggart firmly by the arms. I looked at the clock and smiled. "I'm sorry, chaps," I addressed the baffled bettors before me, "but I'm afraid you've lost. Two minutes remain, and the Dutch Master has just been apprehended. That's him there." I pointed to Elston, who squirmed and scowled and gritted his teeth.

I picked up the envelope that was supposed to contain my refund check. As I'd suspected, it was empty. He'd had no intention of giving me a refund. He and his accomplice Taggart had timed their entries so that I would have to pay off Taggart *before* Elston gave me the envelope. Then Elston would chase Taggart out of my shop, presumably in hot pursuit, and both would leap into a waiting car and make their escape.

It had been an elaborate but brilliant swindle attempt, and it would have worked had Inspector Fedwell not come around to my shop the first day to ask me what I knew. I thought it strange at the time that Fedwell hadn't been told by his own colleagues about the scheme they'd put me up to. But I'd mistakenly marked this

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discrepancy down to suspicion of Fedwell.

Fedwell however, though the homeliest-looking Scotland Yard man I've ever seen, was nonetheless genuine, and the reason he knew nothing of the Yard's scheme was that there *was* no scheme. I'd been conned by Elston into thinking there was. But when I visited the Yard on the evening of the fifth day I learned three astonishing facts: that there was no such man as Peter Elston on their roster; that there most assuredly was an Inspector Fedwell on their roster; and that not a soul in Scotland Yard knew anything of a scheme to lure the Dutch Master into my shop.

So we set a trap for Elston, and we caught the blighter. That evening he led them to the place where he had hidden the stolen paintings.

Needless to say, the trustees of the reward money knew no more of a scheme to reimburse me than Scotland Yard had; that too had been part of Elston's con job. But in gratitude they voted me £1000 for my detective work, which, added to my winnings on the bet, brought the grand total of £1575. It led me to conclude that if I devoted as much thought to doping the behavior of horses as I do to that of humans, I'd be a very rich turf accountant indeed.

NEXT MONTH . . .

11 ***NEW*** **short stories — including**

MICHAEL GILBERT's *The Cork in the Bottle*

JACOB HAY's *That Was the Day That Was*

H. R. F. KEATING's *Inspector Ghote and the Test Match*

JAMES POWELL's *Kleber on Murder in 30 Volumes*

RICHARD MATHESON's *Needle in the Heart*

3 First Prize Winners —

STANLEY ELLIN's *The Moment of Decision*

A. H. Z. CARR's *The Black Kitten*

AVRAM DAVIDSON's *The Necessity of His Condition*

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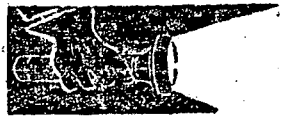

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

And now for September strangeness; don't call it the silly season. Though no first-rate detective novel has come to hand, at least I can offer you three roaring spy thrillers and a brilliant biography of the world's most famous real-life man of mystery.

Each of the three novels begins in London and soars away to explode elsewhere. Each has a protagonist different in nationality and profession, similar in unflappable super-cool. But, since the secret agent has become a folk hero as mighty and all-conquering as Tarzan, that's just as it should be.

Without a quotation which heads chapter nine of **The Melting Man,** by Victor Canning (Morrow, $5.95), nobody could tell what the title means. In every adventure Rex Carver, that free-wheeling private investigator, seems to meet some espionage plot as inevitably as any Scotland Yard man on holiday finds the corpse in his car, under the bridge, or on the golf course.

To Rex Carver comes a call from arrogant Cavan O'Dowda, Irish multimillionaire with Napoleonic dreams of grandeur, two beautiful step-daughters, and somewhat less moral sense than the late Professor Moriarty. This tycoon hires our hero to find a car mysteriously lost on French soil while in charge of Stepdaughter Zelia. Rex, who can't see why losing even a Mercedes should so disturb the tycoon, rightly reasons that the Mercedes must contain some secret cache of great import.

International intrigue has already entered. Accepting the mission without knowing what he's looking for, Rex finds himself enmeshed both by his employer's other daughter and by the international intrigue. Our quest whips across Europe, with murder or mayhem at every turn, to culminate at O'Dowda's hall of waxworks in as fine a shemozzle as the current season affords. Rex Carver has done it again, with reliable Mr. Canning at the very top of his form.

Paul Harris, Scottish businessman of **The Cold Jungle,** by Gavin Black (Harper & Row, $4.95) has left his Far East base for Britain only to buy a ship from the Clydeside firm owned by his old friend Bill Cope. But there are too many snags; general fishiness becomes a reek before the scene shifts northwards.

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Bill Cope's sudden death by 'misadventure' flings Paul into a Scottish manhunt at ever-increasing tempo. And the women he meets seem more inhibited than most anti-heroines, despite that blonde who says she's a call girl. Pursued from the Hebrides, boarding a plane for France, Paul finds answers to the thorny double question: who are the unknown murderers behind this, and who are the unknown agents on Our Side? These answers, as ironic as satisfactory, round out a very satisfactory story.

In Allison Ind's **The Sino-Variant** (McKay, $5.95) it's cloak-and-dagger work from the start. Cornelius Craig, American scientist and former American secret agent, at first won't be drawn back into old ways, resisting all pressure by Sir Kennett Hardy, Chief of British Army Intelligence. But, when a friend from more spacious times has been trapped by the enemy, he can't resist *that*.

For all its British background, most of the action is as American as stud poker. And we are among anti-heroines again; Craig's past conduct towards Sandra, Sir Kennett's daughter, no less than his present conduct towards Beth, his alluring housekeeper, might better be called strip poker with most cards wild. The trail of some newly developed horror, the Sino-variant, leads from London to Taiwan, then round in full circle to the mining country of Wales. Nothing is more American than the confrontation, when Craig, with score tied in the ninth, belts the villain's fast one for a home run.

Finally! No more amorous adventure, but still sensational exploits galore, in the transition from fiction to fact. Though he died more than forty years ago, the man who called himself Harry Houdini—magician, escapologist, master showman—has left so vivid a legend that we have long needed this definitive biography, **Houdini: The Untold Story,** by Milbourne Christopher (Crowell, $6.95).

Born Erich Weiss in Budapest, Hungary, removed in infancy to more prosaic Appleton, Wisconsin, the boy soon developed those gifts which made him a vaudeville headliner all over the world. It was no easy road. Failure he knew, the bitterness of near-despair, before spectacular successes abroad led to equal success in America.

To his colorful story Mr. Milbourne Christopher brings taste, scholarship, insight, the touch of the biographer born. He has not greatly minimized legend by insisting on truth: through a hundred controversies or challenges Houdini the temperamental is allowed to reveal his own complex personality by his own words and deeds. This book is more than the best life of Houdini; it is, quite simply, one of the best biographies I have ever read.

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JAMES BOND (007) again . . .

"The Property of a Lady" is not the usual adventure you associate with James Bond—Agent 007 (with license to kill). Yet, paradoxically, the late Anthony Boucher (and who will ever really take his place?) once told us that he considered "The Property of a Lady" the best story, long or short, that Ian Fleming ever wrote. Is it possible that Fleming's best work was his least spectacular?

Least spectacular? When a missing Faberge masterpiece—the fabulous Emerald Sphere, a mere 1300 carats of Siberian emerald, to say nothing of an accompanying profusion of rose-diamonds and a triangular pigeon-blood Burma ruby, altogether an object of vertu worth more than £100,000—when such a treasure leads to the identification of the top Soviet spy in London, is that "least spectacular"? Yet this spy story is not, as we have said, the usual James Bond adventure—that is, not a tale of the "grimy machine" of espionage and counterespionage . . .

THE PROPERTY OF A LADY

by IAN FLEMING

It was, exceptionally, a hot day in early June. James Bond put down the dark-gray chalk pencil that was the marker for the dockets routed to the Double-O Section and took off his coat. He didn't bother to hang it over the back of his chair, let alone take the trouble to get up and drape the coat over the hanger Mary Goodnight had suspended, at her own cost (damn women!), behind the Office of Works' green door of his connecting office. He dropped the coat on the floor.

There was no reason to keep the coat immaculate, the creases tidy. There was no sign of any work to be done. All over the world there was quiet. The In and Out signals had, for weeks, been routine. The daily top secret

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SITREP, even the newspapers, yawned vacuously—in the latter case scratchings at domestic scandals for readership, for bad news, the only news that makes such sheets readable, whether top secret or on sale for pennies.

Bond hated these periods of vacuum. His eyes, his mind, were barely in focus as he turned the pages of a jaw-breaking dissertation by the Scientific Research Station on the Russian use of cyanide gas, propelled by the cheapest bulb-handled children's water pistol, for assassination. The spray, it seemed, directed at the face, took instantaneous effect. It was recommended for victims from 25 years upward, on ascending stairways or inclines. The verdict would then probably be heart failure.

The harsh burr of the red telephone sprayed into the room so suddenly that James Bond, his mind elsewhere, reached his hand automatically toward his left armpit in self-defense. The edges of his mouth turned down as he recognized the reflex. On the second burr he picked up the receiver.

"Sir?"

"Sir."

He got up from his chair and picked up his coat. He put on the coat and at the same time put on his mind. He had been dozing in his bunk. Now he had to go up on the bridge. He walked through into the connecting office and resisted the impulse to ruffle up the inviting nape of Mary Goodnight's golden neck.

He told her "M." and walked out into the close-carpeted corridor and along, between the muted whiz and zing of the Communications Section, of which his Section was a neighbor, to the lift and up to the eighth.

Miss Moneypenny's expression conveyed nothing. It usually conveyed something if she knew something—private excitement, curiosity, or, if Bond was in trouble, encouragement or even anger. Now the smile of welcome showed disinterest. Bond registered that this was going to be some kind of routine job, a bore, and he adjusted his entrance through that fateful door accordingly.

There was a visitor—a stranger. He sat on M.'s left. He only briefly glanced up as Bond came in and took his usual place across the red-leather-topped desk.

M. said, stiffly, "Dr. Fanshawe, I don't think you've met Commander Bond of my Research Department."

Bond was used to these euphemisms.

He got up and held out his hand. Dr. Fanshawe rose, briefly touched Bond's hand, and sat quickly down as if he had touched paws with a Gila monster.

If he looked at Bond, inspected him, and took him in as anything more than an anatomical

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silhouette, Bond thought that Dr. Fanshawe's eyes must be fitted with a thousandth-of-a-second shutter. So this was obviously some kind of expert—a man whose interests lay in facts, things, theories—not in human beings.

Bond wished that M. had given him some kind of brief, hadn't got this puckish, rather childishly malign desire to surprise—to spring the jack-in-a-box on his staff. But Bond, remembering his own boredom of ten minutes ago, and putting himself in M.'s place, had the intuition to realize that M. himself might have been subject to the same June heat, the same oppressive vacuum in his duties, and, faced by the unexpected relief of an emergency, a small one perhaps, had decided to extract the maximum effect, the maximum drama, out of it to relieve his own tedium.

The stranger was middle-aged, rosy, well-fed, and clothed rather foppishly in the neo-Edwardian fashion—turned-up cuffs to his dark blue, four-buttoned coat, a pearl pin in a heavy silk cravat, spotless wing collar, cuff links formed of what appeared to be antique coins, pince-nez on a thick black ribbon. Bond summed him up as something literary, a critic perhaps, a bachelor—possibly with homosexual tendencies.

M. said, "Dr. Fanshawe is a noted authority on antique jewelry. He is also, though this is confidential, adviser to H.M. Customs and to the C.I.D. on such things. He has in fact been referred to me by our friends at M.I.5. It is in connection with our Miss Freudenstein."

Bond raised his eyebrows. Maria Freudenstein was a secret agent working for the Soviet KGB in the heart of the Secret Service. She was in the Communications Department, but in a watertight compartment of it that had been created especially for her, and her duties were confined to operating the Purple Cipher—a cipher which had also been created especially for her. Six times a day she was responsible for encoding and dispatching lengthy SITREPS in this cipher to the C.I.A. in Washington. These messages were the out-put of Section 100 which was responsible for running double agents. They were an ingenious mixture of true fact, harmless disclosures, and an occasional nugget of the grossest misinformation.

Maria Freudenstein, who had been known to be a Soviet agent when she was taken into the Service, had been allowed to steal the key to the Purple Cipher with the intention that the Russians should have complete access to these SITREPS—be able to intercept and decipher them—and thus, when appropriate, be fed false information. It was a highly secret operation which needed to be handled with extreme delicacy; but

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it had now been running smoothly for three years and, if Maria Freudenstein also picked up a certain amount of canteen gossip at Headquarters, that was a necessary risk, and she was not attractive enough to form liaisons which could be a security risk.

M. turned to Dr. Fanshawe. "Perhaps, Doctor, you would care to tell Commander Bond what it is all about."

"Certainly, certainly." Dr. Fanshawe looked quickly at Bond and then away again. He addressed his boots. "You see, it's like this, er, Commander. You've heard of a man called Faberge, no doubt. Famous Russian jeweler."

"Made fabulous Easter eggs for the Czar and Czarina before the revolution."

"That was indeed one of his specialties. He made many other exquisite pieces of what we may broadly describe as objects of vertu. Today, in the sale rooms, the best examples fetch truly fabulous prices—£50,000 and more. And recently there entered this country the most amazing specimen of all—the so-called Emerald Sphere, a work of supreme art hitherto known only from a sketch by the great man himself. This treasure arrived by registered post from Paris and it was addressed to this woman of whom you know, Miss Maria Freudenstein."

"Nice little present. Might I ask how you learned of it, Doctor?"

"I am, as your Chief has told you, an adviser to H.M. Customs and Excise in matters concerning antique jewelry and similar works of art. The declared value of the package was £100,000. This was unusual. There are methods of opening such packages clandestinely. The package was opened—under a Home Office Warrant, of course—and I was called in to examine the contents and give a valuation. I immediately recognized the Emerald Sphere from the account and sketch of it given in Mr. Kenneth Snowman's definitive work on Faberge. I said that the declared price might well be on the low side. But what I found of particular interest was the accompanying document which gave, in Russian and French, the provenance of this priceless object."

Dr. Fanshawe gestured toward a photostat of what appeared to be a brief family tree that lay on the desk in front of M. "That is a copy I had made. Briefly, it states that the Sphere was commissioned by Miss Freudenstein's grandfather directly from Faberge in 1917—no doubt as a means of turning some of his rubles into something portable and of great value. On his death in 1918 it passed to his brother and thence, in 1950, to Miss Freudenstein's mother. She, it appears, left Russia as a child and lived in White Russian emigre circles in Paris.

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She never married, but gave birth to this girl, Maria, illegitimately. It seems that she died last year and that some friend or executor, the paper is not signed, has forwarded the Sphere to its rightful owner, Miss Maria Freudenstein.

"I had no reason to question this girl, although as you can imagine my interest was most lively, until last month Sotheby's announced that they would auction the piece, described as 'the property of a lady,' a week from today. On behalf of the British Museum and, er, other interested parties, I then made discreet inquiries and met the lady, who, with perfect composure, confirmed the rather unlikely story contained in the provenance. It was then that I learned that she worked for the Ministry of Defense and it crossed my rather suspicious mind that it was, to say the least of it, odd that a junior clerk, engaged presumably on sensitive duties, should suddenly receive a gift to the value of £100,000 or more from abroad. I spoke to a senior official in M.I.5 with whom I have some contact through my work for H.M. Customs and I was in due course referred to this, er, department." Dr. Fanshawe spread his hands and gave Bond a brief glance. "And that, Commander, is all I have to tell you."

M. broke in, "Thank you, Doctor. Just one or two final questions and I won't detain you any further. You have examined this emerald ball thing and you pronounce it genuine?"

Dr. Fanshawe ceased gazing at his boots. He looked up and spoke to a point somewhere above M.'s left shoulder. "Certainly. So does Mr. Snowman of Wartski's, the greatest Faberge experts and dealers in the world. It is undoubtedly the missing masterpiece of which hitherto Carl Faberge's sketch was the only record."

"What about the provenance? What do the experts say about that?"

"It stands up adequately. The greatest Faberge pieces were nearly always privately commissioned. Miss Freudenstein says that her grandfather was a vastly rich man before the revolution—a porcelain manufacturer. Ninety-nine percent of all Faberge's output has found its way abroad. There are only a few pieces left in the Kremlin—described simply as 'pre-revolutionary examples of Russian jewelry.' The official Soviet view has always been that they are merely capitalist baubles. Officially they despise them as they officially dispise their superb collection of French Impressionists."

"So the Soviet still retain some examples of the work of this man Faberge. Is it possible that this emerald affair could have lain secreted somewhere in the Kremlin through all these years?"

"Certainly. The Kremlin

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treasure is vast. No one knows what they keep hidden. They have only recently put on display what they have wanted to put on display."

M. drew on his pipe. His eyes through the smoke were bland, scarcely interested. "So that, in theory, there is no reason why this emerald ball should not have been unearthed from the Kremlin, furnished with a faked history to establish ownership, and transferred abroad as a reward to some friend of Russia for services rendered?"

"None at all. It would be an ingenious method of greatly rewarding the beneficiary without the danger of paying large sums into his, or her, bank account."

"But the final monetary reward would of course depend on the amount realized by the sale of the object—the auction price for instance?"

"Exactly."

"And what do you expect this object to fetch at Sotheby's?"

"Impossible to say. Wartski's will certainly bid very high. But of course they wouldn't be prepared to tell anyone just how high—either on their own account for stock, so to speak, or acting on behalf of a customer. Much would depend on how high they are forced up by an underbidder. Anyway, not less than £100,000 I'd say."

"Hm." M.'s mouth turned down at the corners. "Expensive hunk of jewelry."

Dr. Fanshawe was aghast at this barefaced revelation of M.'s philistinism. He actually looked M. straight in the face. "My dear sir," he expostulated, "do you consider the stolen Goya, sold at Sotheby's for £140,000, that went to the National Gallery, just an expensive hunk, as you would put it, of canvas and paint?"

M. said placatingly, "Forgive me, Dr. Fanshawe. I expressed myself clumsily. I have never had the leisure to interest myself in works of art nor, on a naval officer's pay, the money to acquire any. I was just registering my dismay at the runaway prices being fetched at auction these days."

"You are entitled to your views, sir," said Dr. Fanshawe stuffily.

Bond thought it was time to rescue M. He also wanted to get Dr. Fanshawe out of the room so that they could get down to the professional aspects of this odd business. He got to his feet. He said to M., "Well, sir, I don't think there is anything else I need to know. No doubt this will turn out to be perfectly straight-forward (like hell it would!) and just a matter of one of your staff turning out to be a very lucky woman. But it's very kind of Dr. Fanshawe to have gone to so much trouble." He turned to Dr. Fanshawe. "Would you care to have a staff car take you where you're going?"

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"No, thank you, thank you very much. It will be pleasant to walk across the park."

Hands were shaken, goodbyes said, and Bond showed the doctor out. Bond came back into the room. M. had taken a bulky file, stamped with the top-secret red star, out of a drawer and was already immersed in it. Bond took his seat again and waited. The room was silent save for the riffling of paper. This also stopped as M. extracted a foolscap sheet of blue cardboard used for Confidential Staff Records and carefully read through the forest of close type on both sides.

Finally he slipped it back in the file and looked up. "Yes," he said and the blue eyes were bright with interest. "It fits all right. The girl was born in Paris in 1935. Mother very active in the Resistance during the war. Helped run the Tulip Escape Route and got away with it. After the war the girl went to the Sorbonne and then got a job in the Embassy, in the Naval Attache's office, as an interpreter. You know the rest. She was compromised—some unattractive sexual business—by some of her mother's old Resistance friends who by then were working for the NKVD, and from then on she has been working under Control. She applied, no doubt on instruction, for British citizenship.

"Her clearance from the Embassy and her mother's Resistance record helped her to get that by 1959, and she was then recommended to us by the FO. But it was there that she made her big mistake. She asked for a year's leave before coming to us and was next reported by the Hutchinson network in the Leningrad espionage school. There she presumably received the usual training and we had to decide what to do about her. Section 100 thought up the Purple Cipher operation and you know the rest. She's been working for three years inside headquarters for the KGB and now she's getting her reward—this emerald ball thing worth £100,000.

"And that's interesting on two counts. First, it means that the KGB is totally hooked on the Purple Cipher or they wouldn't be making this fantastic payment. That's good news. It means that we can hot up the material we're passing over—put across some Grade 3 deception material and perhaps even move up to Grade 2. Secondly, it explains something we've never been able to understand—that this girl hasn't hitherto received a single payment for her services. We were worried by that. She had an account at Glyn, Mills that only registered her monthly paycheck of around £50. And she's consistently lived within it. Now she's getting her payoff in one large lump sum

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via this bauble we've been learning about. All very satisfactory."

M. reached for the ashtray made out of a twelve-inch shell base and rapped out his pipe with the air of a man who has done a good afternoon's work.

Bond shifted in his chair. He badly needed a cigarette, but he wouldn't have dreamed of lighting one. He wanted one to help him focus his thoughts. He felt that there were some ragged edges to this problem—one particularly. He said mildly, "Have we ever caught up with her local Control, sir? How does she get her instructions?"

"Doesn't need to," said M. impatiently, busying himself with his pipe. "Once she'd got hold of the Purple Cipher all she needed to do was hold down her job. Damn it man, she's pouring the stuff into their lap six times a day. What sort of instructions would they need to give her? I doubt if the KGB men in London even know of her existence—perhaps the Resident Director does, but as you know we don't even know who he is. Give my eyes to find out."

Bond suddenly had a flash of intuition. It was as if a camera had started grinding in his skull, grinding out a length of clear film. He said quietly, "It might be that this business at Sotheby's could show him to us—show us who he is."

"What the devil are you talking about, 007? Explain yourself."

"Well, sir," Bond's voice was calm with certainty, "you remember what this Dr. Fanshawe said about an underbidder—someone to make these Wartski merchants go to their very top price. If the Russians don't seem to know or care very much about Faberge, as Dr. Fanshawe says, they may have no very clear idea what this thing's really worth. The KGB wouldn't be likely to know about such things anyway. They may imagine it's only worth its break-up value—say ten or twenty thousand pounds for the emerald. That sort of sum would make more sense than the small fortune the girl's going to get if Dr. Fanshawe's right.

"Well, if the Resident Director is the only man who knows about this girl he will be the only man who knows she's been paid. So he'll be the underbidder. He'll be sent to Sotheby's and told to push the sale through the roof. I'm certain of it. So we'll be able to identify him and we'll have enough on him to have him sent home. He just won't know what's hit him. Nor will the KGB. If I can go to the sale and bowl him out and we've got the place covered with cameras, and the auction records, we can get the FO to declare him *persona non grata* inside a week. And Resident Directors don't grow on trees. It may be months before the KGB

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can appoint a replacement."

M. said thoughtfully, "Perhaps you've got something there." He swiveled his chair round and gazed out of the big window toward the jagged skyline of London. Finally he said, over his shoulder, "All right, 007. Go and see the Chief of Staff and set the machinery up. I'll square things with Five. It's their territory, but it's our bird. There won't be any trouble. But don't go and get carried away and bid for this bit of rubbish yourself. I haven't got the money to spare."

Bond said, "No, sir." He got to his feet and went quickly out of the room. He thought he had been very clever and he wanted to see if he had. He didn't want M. to change his mind.

Wartski has a modest, ultramodern frontage at 138 Regent Street. The window, with a restrained show of modern and antique jewlry, gave no hint that these were the greatest Faberge dealers in the world. The interior—gray carpet, walls paneled in sycamore, a few unpretentious vitrines—held none of the excitement of Cartier's, Boucheron, or Van Cleef, but the group of famed Royal Warrants from Queen Mary, the Queen Mother, the Queen, King Paul of Greece, and the unlikely King Frederick IX of Denmark, suggested that this was no ordinary jeweler.

James Bond asked for Mr. Kenneth Snowman. A good-looking, very well-dressed man of about 40 rose from a group of men sitting with their heads together at the back of the room and came forward.

Bond said quietly, "I'm from the C.I.D. Can we have a talk? Perhaps you'd like to check my credentials first. My name's James Bond. But you'll have to go direct to Sir Ronald Vallance or his P.A. I'm not directly on the strength at Scotland Yard. Sort of liaison job."

The intelligent, observant eyes didn't appear even to look him over. The man smiled. "Come on downstairs. Just having a talk with some American friends—sort of correspondents really. From 'Old Russia' on Fifth Avenue."

"I know the place," said Bond. "Full of rich-looking icons and so on. Not far from the Pierre."

"That's right." Mr. Snowman seemed even more reassured. He led the way down a narrow, thickly carpeted stairway into a large and glittering showroom which was obviously the real treasurehouse of the shop. Gold and diamonds and cut stones winked from lit cases round the walls.

"Have a seat. Cigarette?"

Bond took one of his own. "It's about this Faberge that's coming up at Sotheby's tomorrow—this Emerald Sphere."

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"Ah, yes." Mr. Snowman's clear brow furrowed anxiously. "No trouble about it, I hope?"

"Not from your point of view. But we're very interested in the actual sale. We know about the owner, Miss Freudenstein. We think there may be an attempt to raise the bidding artificially. We're interested in the underbidder—assuming, that is, that your firm will be leading the field, so to speak."

"Well, er, yes," said Mr. Snowman with rather careful candor. "We're certainly going to go after it. But it'll sell for a huge price. Between you and me, we believe the V and A are going to bid, and probably the Metropolitan. But is it some crook you're after? If so you needn't worry. This is out of their class."

Bond said, "No. We're not looking for a crook." He wondered how far to go with this man. Because people are very careful with the secrets of their own business doesn't mean that they'll be careful with the secrets of yours. Bond picked up a wood and ivory plaque that lay on the table. It said:

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer.
But when he is gone his way, he boasteth.

Proverbs XX, 14

Bond was amused. He said so. "You can read the whole history of the bazaar, of the dealer and the customer, behind the quotation," he said. He looked Mr. Snowman straight in the eyes. "I need that sort of nose, that sort of intuition in this case. Will you give me a hand?"

"Certainly. If you'll tell me how I can help." He waved a hand. "If it's secrets you're worried about, please don't worry. Jewelers are used to them. Scotland Yard will probably give my firm a clean bill in that respect. Heaven knows we've had enough to do with them over the years."

"And if I told you that I'm from the Ministry of Defense?"

"Same thing," said Mr. Snowman. "You can naturally rely absolutely on my discretion."

Bond made up his mind. "All right. Well, all this comes under the Official Secrets Act, of course. We suspect that the underbidder, presumably to you, will be a Soviet Agent. My job is to establish his identity. Can't tell you any more, I'm afraid. And you don't actually need to know any more. All I want is to go with you to Sotheby's tomorrow night and for you to help me spot the man. No medals, I'm afraid, but we'd be extremely grateful."

Mr. Kenneth Snowman's eyes glinted with enthusiasm. "Of course. Delighted to help in any way. But," he looked doubtful, "you know it's not necessarily

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going to be all that easy. Peter Wilson, the head of Sotheby's, who'll be taking the sale, would be the only person who could tell us for sure—that is, if the bidder wants to stay secret. There are dozens of ways of bidding without making any movement at all. But if the bidder fixes his method, his code so to speak, with Peter Wilson before the sale, Peter wouldn't think of letting anyone in on the code. It would give the bidder's game away to reveal his limit. And that's a close secret, as you can imagine, in the rooms. And a thousand times not if you come with me.

"I shall probably be setting the pace. I already know how far I'm going to go—for a client, by the way—but it would make my job vastly easier if I could tell how far the underbidder's going to go. As it is, what you've told me has been a great help. I shall warn my man to put his sights even higher. If this chap of yours has got a strong nerve he may push me very hard indeed. And there will be others in the field, of course. It sounds as if this is going to be quite a night. They're putting it on television and asking all the millionaries and dukes and duchesses for the sort of gala performance Sotheby's do rather well. Wonderful publicity, of course. By jove, if they knew there was cloak-and-dagger stuff mixed up with the sale, there'd be a riot! Now then, is there anything else to go into? Just spot this man and that's all?"

"That's all. How much do you think this thing will go for?"

Mr. Snowman tapped his teeth with a gold pencil. "Well, now, you see that's where I have to keep quiet. I know how high I'm going to go, but that's my client's secret." He paused and looked thoughtful. "Let's say that if it goes for less than £100,000 we'll be surprised."

"I see," said Bond. "Now then, how do I get into the sale?"

Mr. Snowman produced an elegant alligator-skin notecase and extracted two engraved bits of pasteboard. He handed one over. "That's my wife's. I'll get her one somewhere else in the rooms. B.5—well placed in the center front. I'm B.6."

Bond took the ticket. It said:

Sotheby & Co.
Sale of
A Casket of Magnificent Jewels
and
A Unique Object of Vertu by
Carl Faberge
The Property of a Lady
Admit one to the Main Sale Room
Tuesday, 20 June, at 9.30 p.m.
precisely
Entrance in St. George Street

"It's not the old Georgian entrance in Bond Street," commented Mr. Snowman. "They have an awning and red carpet out from their back door now that Bond

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Street's one way. Now," he got up from his chair, "would you care to see some Faberge? We've got some pieces here my father bought from the Kremlin around 1927. It'll give you some idea what all the fuss is about, though of course the Emerald Sphere's incomparably finer than anything I can show you by Faberge apart from the Imperial Easter Eggs."

Later, dazzled by the diamonds, the multicolored gold, the silken sheen of translucent enamels, James Bond walked up and out of the Aladdin's Cave under Regent Street and went off to spend the rest of the day in drab offices around Whitehall planning drearily minute arrangements for the identification and photographing of a man in a crowded room who did not yet possess a face or an identity but who was certainly the top Soviet spy in London.

Through the next day Bond's excitement mounted. He found an excuse to go into the Communications Section and wander into the little room where Miss Maria Freudenstein and two assistants were working the cipher machines that handled the Purple Cipher dispatches. He picked up the *en clair* file—he had freedom of access to most material at headquarters—and ran his eye down the carefully edited paragraphs that, in half an hour or so, would be spiked, unread, by some junior C.I.A. clerk in Washington and, in Moscow, be handed, with reverence, to a top-ranking officer of the KGB. He joked with the two junior girls, but Maria Freudenstein only looked up from her machine to give hime a polite smile and Bond's skin crawled minutely at this proximity to treachery and at the black and deadly secret locked up beneath the frilly white blouse.

She was an unattractive girl with a pale, rather pimply skin, black hair, and a vaguely unwashed appearance. Such a girl would be unloved, make few friends, have chips on her shoulder—more particularly in view of her illegitimacy—and a grouse against society. Perhaps her only pleasure in life was the triumphant secret she harbored in that flattish bosom—the knowledge that she was cleverer than all those around her, that she was, every day, hitting back against the world—the world that despised, or just ignored her, because of her plainness—with all her might. One day they'd be sorry! It was a common neurotic pattern—the revenge of the ugly duckling on society.

Bond wandered off down the corridor to his own office. By tonight that girl would have made a fortune, been paid her thirty pieces of silver a thousandfold. Perhaps the money would change her character, bring her happiness. She would be able to afford the

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best beauty specialists, the best clothes, a pretty flat. But M. had said he was now going to hot up the Purple Cipher Operation, try a more dangerous level of deception. This would be dicey work. One false step, one incautious lie, an ascertainable falsehood in a message, and the KGB would smell a rat. Once more, and they would know they were being hoaxed and probably had been ignominiously hoaxed for three years.

Such a shameful revelation would bring quick revenge. It would be assumed that Maria Freudenstein had been acting as a double agent, working for the British as well as the Russians. She would inevitably and quickly be liquidated—perhaps with the cyanide pistol that Bond had been reading about only the day before.

James Bond, looking out of the window across the trees in Regent's Park, shrugged. Thank God it was none of his business. The girl's fate wasn't in his hands. She was caught in the grimy machine of espionage and she would be lucky if she lived to spend a tenth of the fortune she was going to gain in a few hours at the auction.

There was a line of cars and taxis blocking George Street behind Sotheby's. Bond paid off his taxi and joined the crowd filtering under the awning and up the steps. He was handed a catalogue by the uniformed Commissionaire who inspected his ticket, and went up the broad stairs with the fashionable, excited crowd and along a gallery and into the main auction room that was already thronged. He found his seat next to Mr. Snowman, who was writing figures on a pad on his knee, and looked round him.

The lofty room was perhaps as large as a tennis court. It had the look and the smell of age, and the two large chandeliers, to fit in with the period, blazed warmly in contrast to the strip lighting along the vaulted ceiling whose glass roof was partly obscured by a blind, still halfdrawn against the sun that would be blazing down on the afternoon's sale. Miscellaneous pictures and tapestries hung on the olive-green walls and batteries of television and other cameras (among them the M.I.5 cameraman with a press pass from *The Sunday Times*) were clustered with their handlers on a platform built out from the middle of a giant tapestried hunting scene.

There were perhaps a hundred dealers and spectators sitting attentively on small gilt chairs. All eyes were focused on the slim good-looking auctioneer, talking quietly from the raised wooden pulpit. He was dressed in an immaculate dinner jacket with a red carnation in the buttonhole. He

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spoke unemphatically and without gestures.

"Fifteen thousand pounds. And sixteen"—a pause. A glance at someone in the front row. "Against you, sir." The flick of a catalogue being raised. "Seventeen thousand pounds I am bid. Eighteen. Nineteen. I am bid twenty thousand pounds." And so the quiet voice went, calmly, unhurriedly on while down among the audience the equally impassive bidders signaled their responses to the litany.

"What is he selling?" asked Bond, opening his catalogue.

"Lot 40," said Mr. Snowman. "That diamond riviere the porter's holding on the black velvet tray. It'll probably go for about twenty-five. An Italian is bidding against a couple of Frenchmen. Otherwise they'd have got it for twenty. I only went to fifteen. Liked to have got it. Wonderful stones. But there it is."

Sure enough, the price stuck at twenty-five thousand and the hammer, held by its head and not by its handle, came down with soft authority. "Yours, sir," said Mr. Peter Wilson and a salesclerk hurried down the aisle to confirm the identity of the bidder.

"I'm disappointed," said Bond.

Mr. Snowman looked up from his catalogue. "Why is that?"

"I've never been to an auction before and I always thought the auctioneer banged his gavel three times and said going, going, gone, so as to give the bidders a last chance."

Mr. Snowman laughed. "You might still find that operating in the Shires or in Ireland, but it hasn't been the fashion at London salerooms since I've been attending them."

"Pity. It adds to the drama."

"You'll get plenty of that in a minute. This is the last lot before the curtain goes up on the Emerald Sphere."

One of the porters had reverently uncoiled a glittering mass of rubies and diamonds on his black velvet tray. Bond looked at the catalogue. It said "Lot 41" which the luscious prose described as:

> A Pair of Fine and Important Ruby and Diamond Bracelets, the front of each in the form of an elliptical cluster composed of one larger and two smaller rubies within a border of cushioned-shaped diamonds, the sides and back formed of simpler clusters alternating with diamond openwork scroll motifs springing from single-stone ruby centers millegriffe-set in gold, running between chains of rubies and diamonds linked alternately, the clasp also in the form of an elliptical cluster.
>
> According to family tradition, this lot was formerly the property of Mrs. Fitzherbert (1756-1837) whose marriage to

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the Prince of Wales, afterwards Geo. IV, was definitely established when in 1905 a sealed packet deposited at Coutts Bank in 1833 and opened by Royal permission disclosed the marriage certificate and other conclusive proofs.

These bracelets were probably given by Mrs. Fitzherbert to her niece, who was described by the Duke of Orleans as "the prettiest girl in England."

While the bidding progressed, Bond slipped out of his seat and went down the aisle to the back of the room where the overflow audience spread out into the New Gallery and the Entrance Hall to watch the sale on closed-circuit television. He casually inspected the crowd, seeking any face he could recognize from the 200 members of the Soviet Embassy staff whose photographs, clandestinely obtained, he had been studying during the past day. But in an audience that defied classification—a mixture of dealers, amateur collectors, and what could be broadly classified as rich pleasure-seekers—there was not a face that he could recognize except from the gossip columns.

One or two sallow faces might have been Russian, but equally they might have belonged to half a dozen European races. There was a scattering of dark glasses, but dark glasses are no longer a disguise. Bond went back to his seat. Presumably the man would have to divulge himself when the bidding began.

"Fourteen thousand I am bid. And fifteen. Fifteen thousand." The hammer came down. "Yours, sir."

There was a hum of excitement and a fluttering of catalogues. Mr. Snowman wiped his forehead with a white silk handkerchief. He turned to Bond. "Now I'm afraid you are more or less on your own. I've got to pay attention to the bidding and anyway for some unknown reason it's considered bad form to look over one's shoulder to see who's bidding against you—if you're in the trade, that's to say—so I'll only be able to spot him if he's somewhere up front here, and I'm afraid that's unlikely. Pretty much all dealers, but you can stare around as much as you like. What you've got to do is to watch Peter Wilson's eyes and then try and see who he's looking at, or who's looking at him.

"If you can spot the man, which may be quite difficult, note any movement he makes, even the very smallest. Whatever the man does—scratching his head, pulling at the lobe of his ear, or whatever, will be a code he's arranged with Peter Wilson. I'm afraid he won't do anything obvious like raising his catalogue. Do you get me? And don't forget that he may make

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absolutely no movement at all until right at the end when he's pushed me as far as he thinks I'll go, then he'll want to sign off. Mark you," Mr. Snowman smiled, "when we get to the last lap I'll put plenty of heat on him and try and make him show his hand. That's assuming, of course, that we are the only two bidders left in." He looked enigmatic. "And I think you can take it that we shall be."

From the man's certainty James Bond felt pretty sure that Mr. Snowman had been given instructions to get the Emerald Sphere at any cost.

A sudden hush fell as a tall pedestal draped in black velvet was brought in with ceremony and positioned in front of the auctioneer's rostrum. Then a handsome oval case of what looked like white velvet was placed on top of the pedestal and, with reverence, an elderly porter in gray uniform with wine-red sleeves, collar, and back belt, unlocked it and lifted out Lot 42, placed it on the black velvet, and removed the case.

The cricket ball of polished emerald on its exquisite base glowed with a supernatural green fire and the jewels on its surface and on the opalescent meridian winked their various colors.

There was a gasp of admiration from the audience and even the clerks and experts behind the rostrum and sitting at the tall counting-house desk beside the auctioneer, accustomed to the Crown Jewels of Europe parading before their eyes, leaned forward to get a better look.

James Bond turned to his catalogue. There it was, in heavy type and in prose as stickily luscious as a butterscotch sundae:

THE TERRESTRIAL GLOBE DESIGNED IN 1917 BY CARL FABERGE FOR A RUSSIAN GENTLEMAN AND NOW THE PROPERTY OF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER

42 A VERY IMPORTANT FABERGE TERRESTRIAL GLOBE. A sphere carved from an extraordinarily large piece of Siberian emerald matrix weighing approximately one thousand three hundred carats, and of a superb color and vivid translucence, represents a terrestrial globe supported upon an elaborate *rocaille* scroll mount finely chased in *quatre-couleur* gold and set with a profusion of rose-diamonds and small emeralds of intense color, to form a table clock.

Around this mount six gold *putti* disport themselves among cloud forms which are naturalistically rendered in carved rock-crystal finished matt and veined with fine lines of tiny rose-diamonds. The globe itself, the surface of which is meticulously engraved with a

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map of the world with the principal cities indicated by brilliant diamonds embedded within gold collets, rotates mechanically on an axis controlled by a small clock movement, by *G. Moser,* signed, which is concealed in the base, and is girdled by a fixed gold belt enameled opalescent oyster along a reserved path in *champleve* technique over a moire *guillochage* with painted Roman numerals in pale sepia enamel serving as the dial of the clock, and a single triangular pigeon-blood Burma ruby of about five carats set into the surface of the orb, pointing the hour. Height: 7½*in. Workmaster, Henrik Wigstrom.* In the original double-opening white velvet, satin-lined, oviform case with the gold key fitted in the base.

The theme of this magnificent sphere is one that had inspired Faberge some fifteen years earlier, as evidenced in the miniature terrestrial globe which forms part of the Royal Collection at Sandringham. (See plate 280 in *The Art of Carl Faberge,* by A. Kenneth Snowman.)

After a brief and searching glance round the room Mr. Wilson banged his hammer softly. "Lot 42—an object of vertu by Carl Faberge." A pause. "Twenty thousand pounds I am bid."

Mr. Snowman whispered to Bond, "That means he's probably got a bid of at least fifty. This is simply to get things moving."

Catalogues fluttered. "And thirty, forty, fifty thousand pounds I am bid. And sixty, seventy, and eighty thousand pounds. And ninety." A pause and then: "One hundred thousand pounds I am bid."

There was a rattle of applause round the room. The cameras had swiveled to a youngish man, one of three on a raised platform to the left of the auctioneer who were speaking softly into telephones. Mr. Snowman commented, "That's one of Sotheby's young men. He'll be on an open line to America. I should think that's the Metropolitan bidding, but it might be anybody. Now it's time for me to get to work." Mr. Snowman flicked up his rolled catalogue.

"And ten," said the auctioneer. The man spoke into his telephone and nodded. "And twenty."

Again a flick from Mr. Snowman.

"And thirty."

The man on the telephone seemed to be speaking rather more words than before into his mouthpiece—perhaps giving his estimate of how much higher the price was likely to go. He gave a slight shake of his head in the direction of the auctioneer and Peter Wilson looked away from

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him and round the room.

"One hundred and thirty thousand pounds I am bid," he repeated quietly.

Mr. Snowman said softly to Bond, "Now you'd better watch out. America seems to have signed off. It's time for your man to start pushing me."

James Bond slid out of his place and went and stood among a group of reporters in a corner to the left of the rostrum. Peter Wilson's eyes were directed toward the far right-hand corner of the room. Bond could detect no movement, but the auctioneer announced, "And forty thousand pounds." He looked down at Mr. Snowman. After a long pause Mr. Snowman raised five fingers. Bond guessed that this was part of his process of putting the heat on. He was showing reluctance, hinting that he was near the end of his tether.

"One hundred and forty-five thousand." Again the piercing glance toward the back of the room. Again no movement. But again some signal had been exchanged. "One hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

There was a buzz of comment and some desultory clapping. This time Mr. Snowman's reaction was even slower and the auctioneer twice repeated the last bid. Finally he looked directly at Mr. Snowman. "Against you, sir." At last Mr. Snowman raised five fingers.

James Bond was beginning to sweat. He had got absolutely nowhere and the bidding must surely be coming to an end. The auctioneer repeated the bid.

And now there was the tiniest movement. At the back of the room a chunky-looking man in a dark suit reached up and unobtrusively took off his dark glasses. It was a smooth nondescript face—the sort of face that might belong to a bank manager, a member of Lloyd's, or a doctor. This must have been the prearranged code with the auctioneer. So long as the man wore his dark glasses he would raise in tens of thousands. When he took them off, he had quit.

Bond shot a quick glance toward the bank of cameramen. Yes, the M.I.5 photographer was on his toes. He had also seen the movement. He lifted his camera deliberately and there was the quick glare of a flash. Bond got back to his seat and whispered to Snowman, "Got him. Be in touch with you tomorrow. Thanks a lot." Mr. Snowman only nodded. His eyes remained glued on the auctioneer.

Bond slipped out of his place and walked swiftly down the aisle as the auctioneer said for the third time, "One hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds I am bid," and then softly brought down his hammer. "Yours, sir."

Bond got to the back of the

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room before the audience had risen, applauding, to its feet. His quarry was hemmed in among the gilt chairs. He had now put on his dark glasses again and Bond put on a pair of his own. He contrived to slip into the crowd and get behind the man as the chattering crowd streamed down the stairs. The hair grew low on the back of the man's rather squat neck and the lobes of his ears were pinched in close to his head. He had a slight hump, perhaps only a bone deformation, high up on his back.

Bond suddenly remembered. This was Piotr Malinowski, with the official title on the Embassy staff of "Agricultural Attache." So!

Outside, the man began walking swiftly toward Conduit Street. James Bond got unhurriedly into a taxi with its engine running and its flag down. He said to the driver, "That's him. Take it easy."

"Yes, sir," said the M.I.5 driver, pulling away from the curb.

The man picked up a taxi in Bond Street. The tail in the mixed evening traffic was easy. Bond's satisfaction mounted as the Russian's taxi turned up north of the Park and along Bayswater. It was just a question whether he would turn down the private entrance into Kensington Palace Gardens, where the first mansion on the left is the massive building of the Soviet Embassy. If he did, that would clinch matters. The two patrolling policemen, the usual Embassy guards, had been specially picked that night. It was their job just to confirm that the occupant of the leading taxi actually entered the Soviet Embassy.

Then, with the Secret Service evidence and the evidence of Bond and of the M.I.5 cameraman, there would be enough for the Foreign Office to declare Comrade Piotr Malinowski *persona non grata* on the grounds of espionage activity and send him packing. In the grim chess game that is secret service work the Russians would have lost a queen. It would have been a very satisfactory visit to the auction rooms.

The leading taxi *did* turn in through the big iron gates.

Bond smiled with grim satisfaction. He leaned forward. "Thanks, driver. Headquarters please."

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An unusual story by an author whose firmness and assurance of style grow with each new story she writes... We ask you to read "The Ones Left Behind" as a picture of a newly emerging (as distinguished from "an underdeveloped") African nation—as a revelation of some of its changes and conflicts, and especially of some of the problems which its people are facing individually and in family units...

THE ONES LEFT BEHIND

by JOAN RICHTER

TETU STARED OUT OF THE WINDOW and watched the dust settle in the gravel driveway. That was all that was left of the Europeans—the red dust from their car. The house was empty. Beds, books, clothes, dishes—everything was gone, and the house was now ready for the next family to move in. And like the other families before, they would stay in Kenya for two years, maybe four; and then leave, returning to America, to England, to Germany, to whatever country they had come from. Some families he remembered and others he tried to forget, like the first ones he had worked for—but that had been before Independence, when a white man could do anything he pleased with an African.

Somewhere behind Tetu, in one of the empty rooms, a closet door opened and closed. He almost turned, thinking that it was the Memsab, that she had not gone. But it was only Kamba sweeping out the closets, the last of the chores that had to be done. Yesterday the windows had been washed and the floors scrubbed, and this morning Tetu had polished the dark wood once more, using the sheepskins that fitted over his shoes. They made the floors shine and the little European boy laugh. He had skated alongside Tetu, helping for the last time.

It was important that the house be clean, to show the new people that he and his helper Kamba knew how to keep a fine house. It was a good thing for the new Memsab to see right away that he had been with Europeans before, that he understood the wants and needs of white men.

He brushed a flake of paint

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off the window sill and felt the thick wad of twenty-shilling notes move against his thigh. He reached into his pocket and held the comforting packet—a month's salary and two months' farewell bonus.

That was something to be happy about—the extra money. It would take care of the school fees for his children and there would be enough left over for a new shirt for himself. And tonight, or tomorrow, he would go to the cinema.

He loved the cinema, though he did not always understand what he saw—the English was spoken too quickly. But until the day came when there would be films in Swahili he would go and watch the pictures, the bright colors, the speeding cars, ships, planes, fires, tall buildings, and the war.

Kamba came up behind him silently. Tetu had no need to hear him; he could always smell him. The oil that Kamba liked to brush into his hair and rub on his arms had the strong sweet smell of a ripe mango. He could always tell if his helper was coming or if he had just passed through a room.

"What is the matter with you?" Kamba asked. He was seventeen, younger than Tetu by ten years, and he spoke gruffly, with a bit of the braggart about him. "Why do you stand at the window? It is where I left you a long time ago."

Tetu ignored the question. "Have you swept all the closets?"

"All. Now I am ready to go to town." He leaned the broom against the wall and reached into the pocket of his shirt. He, too, had a wad of twenty-shilling notes. He fanned them.

"That is a lot of money," Tetu said, knowing it was more money than Kamba had ever seen, because this was his first employment in the city, the first time he had worked for a European.

Kamba shrugged and put the money back in his pocket. "Let us go in to town."

Tetu shook his head. "I will take lunch first and then have a small sleep. Maybe I will not go in to town until tomorrow."

"How can you sleep when there is money to spend?"

"Because there are other things I must think of besides myself. You should think of them too. It would be better if you went to the post office first and started a savings account. Then go to town."

"Why do I need to save money?"

"You will marry someday. You will have children and they will need clothes. You will have to send them to school. That takes many shillings."

"You have been working for Europeans too long, Tetu. You sound like the Memsab."

It was a great insult to be compared with a woman, but Tetu swallowed his anger, because

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Kamba was young and he did not mean the words the way they sounded.

"I will worry about a wife and children when the time comes," Kamba went on. "Now I will go in to town. And tonight I will go to the cinema and after that I will go to Mary's."

Tetu frowned. Kamba went to Mary's too much. Tetu had been there twice and he thought he would not go again. The women there were not like the women of their tribe. Their heads were not shaved clean and their painted mouths smelled of *pombe*—not the good sweet African beer, but the European's whiskey. That, too, he had tried. One bottle had cost him a whole month's salary and a whole day's being sick in bed.

"Go to the post office first," Tetu said. "It will be a long time before you see that much money again. After Mary's you will have nothing." But even as he said it he knew Kamba was not listening to him and tomorrow there would be nothing left of the money that now made a bulge in the pocket of his shirt.

Sadly Tetu looked out of the window. It was too bad this Memsab had to leave. Kamba might have listened to her counseling. The dust had settled. There was no longer even that sign of them. The Europeans were gone.

"Why do you stand there?" Kamba asked. "Why do you look after them?"

"Because I wish they did not go. Who knows what the next ones will be like?" He looked deeply into Kamba's eyes, thinking. They were of the same clan and therefore brothers. But Tetu felt the responsibility of a father toward the youth, because it was he who had brought Kamba to the city and found a position for him. "You do not know how kind these people were because you have never worked for a European before." He started to tell Kamba about the first white people he had worked for. "One day I drank water from a glass that belonged to them. The Memsab saw me and was very angry. She made me throw the glass away and took the money for it from my wages."

"You have told me that before." Kamba said.

Tetu nodded. "So you would know the difference. So you would not be fooled and think that they are all alike—good, like the Memsab who has just gone."

"And why was she so good? Because she gave us money? We worked. Did we not? I do not understand you, Tetu. You think only of small things that do not matter—drinking from glasses! Have you forgotten about your wife?"

Tetu repeated the word softly, "Wife?" Almost as though "wife" was a new word to him, or one

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he had not used for a long time. "Why do you speak of my wife?"

"Because you have been talking of the *good* Memsab. And because you seem to have forgotten that it is this *good* Memsab who is to blame for what happened."

Tetu frowned. He did not understand what Kamba was saying, and at the same time he was disturbed by a strange feeling that had begun to move inside him, an unpleasant heat which made his head feel swollen and which dried up the saliva that moved around his tongue. He hesitated before he spoke. "What happened, Kamba? What is this thing you speak of?"

Kamba looked at him for a long time. Then finally he said, "We are brothers, Tetu, are we not? And if you do not remember I cannot tell you. There are some things a brother knows about a brother that he cannot say, even to a brother." He reached for the broom that he had leaned against the wall and without another word walked out of the house.

Tetu stared out of the window, watching Kamba cross the gravel driveway and disappear behind the hedge that separated the servants' quarters from the rest of the grounds. Only when he heard the door to Kamba's room open did he move and then it was to lay his hands across his stomach to where the heat had spread. It was a fire now, burning in his chest, in his stomach, settling in his bowels. He had to keep his lips pressed together not to cry out from the pain of it.

He waited at the window until the door to Kamba's room slamed shut. Then he backed away so that he could not be seen and watched for Kamba to come around the hedge and start up the driveway into town. When he was sure that Kamba was gone, Tetu left the house, locking the door after him. He put the key in his pocket where it would be safe until the new people came.

The fire in him had burned low, but it had left him with a fierce hunger. He did not wait to warm the *posho,* but rolled the cold corn meal into balls and ate them greedily. When his stomach was filled he closed the door to his room and crawled into bed. He drew the thin blanket up around his shoulders and tried to sleep. After a long time he was still awake. He rolled over on his side and pulled the cover up over his head and closed his eyes...

Ruth was his wife, named by her father after someone from the white man's God book. His own father had said, "It is not a name that belongs to our people. Find another woman. Besides, she is small. She will not bear you many sons."

But times had already begun

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to change by then and a man could choose his own wife. And Tetu chose Ruth and proved his father wrong. She bore him sons. Four and then a fifth. Every year, ten moons after his visit to their village, Ruth gave him a son. Sometimes when he was with her, his joy was so great he did not think he could leave again. He wanted to stay with her and see the look that came into her eyes when they lay on the reed mat together. He wanted the feel of her firm warm flesh.

But there was no work in his village and to stay would mean no money. He *had* to go back to the city. There he could make money that bought clothes and shoes and food and would pay the school fees for his children. He had five children then. And he knew that some day there would be six and then seven and after that eight. Beyond that he did not want to count, to think. It made his head hurt. Where would the money come from to buy them clothes, to send them to school? Above all, in his new nation, education was important. He had to send his sons to school, so when they grew up they could find good jobs and live like Europeans.

One day the Memsab asked him about his family and his wife.

"Has she never been to Nairobi, Tetu?"

"No, madam," he answered respectfully. "It costs many shillings to come by bus from my home."

"Would you like her to come? Would you like to have her visit here?" The blue eyes had looked at him so directly that he had had to look away. The Memsab could not know how much he wanted his wife to come to the city. Ruth would be the first wife in his village to make the journey.

"Yes, madam, I would like that very much."

"Then she shall come, Tetu. She may visit here for one week. I will give you the money for her bus fare and I will give you some extra money so you may take her to the cinema while she is here."

On the day of Ruth's arrival Tetu went to the bus terminal in Nairobi to meet her. His heart was pounding with the excitement of seeing her again, of the thought of showing her all the things of the big city. How proud he was of her when he saw her get off the bus. Her head was wrapped in a neat blue scarf that matched her dress and she was wearing shoes. Almost no one wore shoes in his village, but he had told her everyone wore shoes in the city. He knew she had earned the money to buy them by working overtime in the coffee.

How small she looked, though, and there was fear in her eyes as she stepped off the bus and looked up at him. "I have brought

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the smallest one," she said. "I could not leave him."

Until then he had not noticed the small bundle held close to her breast. First he had seen the shoes, then the look in his small wife's eyes, and only when she spoke of him did she see his son—his new son, whom he had not seen until that very moment. For a brief instant joy fluttered in his heart. But then fear, an old haunting fear that made him feel not like a man, came and took the joy away. Would the Memsab be angry? She had invited his wife to visit, but she might be displeased that the child had come too.

Worry worked in him and turned the blood that beat in his heart to water as he knocked at the door of the main house and presented his wife to the Europeans. The smallest one began to cry and Tetu saw the frown on the Bwana's face. But the Memsab smiled and her blue eyes were kind as she shook hands with Ruth and gently touched the baby's head. She lifted up her own small son so that he might see Tetu's child. In that moment Tetu knew he would never forget the goodness of this Memsab.

How big a man he felt before his wife that week! In the cinema she held on tightly to his arm and sat as still as the child that suckled at her breast, but he could feel her quick breaths of excitement as the bright-colored pictures flashed in front of them. He could not wait to take her home to his room...

A week went by and there was still so much he wanted her to see: the Parliament buildings and the big house where the President lived. He asked the Memsab if Ruth could stay one week more. "One more week, Tetu, but then she must go back to your village. Her place is with your other children. How many do you have?"

"I have five sons, madam."

"And soon you will have six?"

He nodded. He knew that in ten moons there would be a new child taking the place of the one at his wife's breast now. "Yes, madam. Soon there will be six. That is many children."

The Memsab nodded and her blue eyes became troubled. "Your father had many children, Tetu?"

"My father had seventeen sons and six daughters."

"That is many, many children, Tetu."

"It is many. My father had two wives. Times are different and I will have only one."

"You are right, times are different now, Tetu. In your father's life, before Independence, it did not matter that children had no clothes or that they did not go to school. But these are new times, Tetu."

"I know, madam. And I know I must send all my children to

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school. It would be better if I did not have so many."

"There is a clinic at the new hospital, Tetu, where they can tell you how to stop having children."

He remembered how mysterious those words had sounded and he also remembered how afraid they had made him. They reminded him of the first time he had been to a hospital and of the boy in the bed next to him who had his leg cut off because it was the only way to stop him from dying.

The Memsab's blue eyes looked at him as she continued to speak. "There are people at the hospital who speak Swahili much better than I, Tetu, and they can explain to you this thing that can be done. There is no pain and if you change your mind and want more children, that too can be taken care of."

The more she spoke, the more strange and mysterious her words sounded. But this Memsab had been good to him and he trusted her. Slowly his fear began to slip away.

"If you think it is good, madam, I will go."

"I think it is good, Tetu. And I think you should go and listen to what they say. They will show you pictures so you can see how it is done. Take Ruth with you, so she may see too."

And so he and Ruth went to the clinic and they listened to the African nurse tell them things they never imagined could be. She showed them the small white curl of plastic that when put in a woman's body meant no child would grow.

"This is a wonderful thing that you have let us know, madam," Tetu said to the Memsab. "And after our sixth son is born, Ruth would like to return to the hospital and have this done."

And so after their sixth son was born, Ruth came to the city again and the thing was done. And as the Memsab had said, there was no pain, and in ten moons there was no new child. Tetu was not only a big man in his village because his wife had been to the city, but he was a big man because his wife had given him six sons and now something special had happened to her and she would have no more children unless he, Tetu, said he wanted her to.

Oh, how happy he was! And Ruth was happy too, because with no new baby growing inside her she could work longer in the fields picking coffee or tea and there was more money for clothes and food and for the school fees.

Tetu had wanted to share his good fortune with Kamba, so he had told him he would take him to the same clinic when Kamba was ready to marry. Then he would know right away what Tetu had had to wait many years to learn. But Kamba had laughed.

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"When I marry, my wife will have many children. I do not want to waste my seed."

Tetu did not like the sound of Kamba's words and he answered angrily. "It is a waste to plant more seeds than the ground can grow!"

"You are a fool, Tetu. You have begun to think like a European!"

"It is you who are the fool, Kamba. A young fool. Listen to me. This is a new nation. What was good enough for our fathers is not good enough for our children. They must be educated, so they can become leaders in our country. I do not want a son of mine to be a houseboy, like me. What are you, Kamba? A houseboy's helper! Is this what you want for your sons?"

The look that had come to Kamba's face told Tetu that his insult had been felt and he was glad, but the softness in his heart made him wish he had not made his words so harsh. But when Kamba continued to speak, Tetu realized his words had meant nothing to the younger man.

"We are not talking of the same things, Tetu. You talk of school and education. I am talking of your wife and what you had done to her. And what has happened to you because of it."

"What has happened to me, Kamba?"

"You are no longer a man."

Tetu threw his head back and laughed. "That is how much you know! I am a bigger man now than I ever was."

Kamba laughed then, louder than Tetu. "You are a bigger fool than you ever were. You have forgotten the taboos of our tribe. No man but her own husband will lie with a woman who is with child—or else his manhood will wither. And no woman will lie with a man while her husband is away because then he would know that the seed is not his."

"I know these things, Kamba. But what have they to do with what we speak?"

"Your wife is not with child. And no seed will grow inside her because of this special thing that has been done." A sly smile came to Kamba's face. "She can lie with any man while you are gone and you will never know."

With control Tetu had turned quietly away. "Kamba is young and he knows only the ways of the women at Mary's. Some day when he has a wife he may know the difference. He is my brother and I will let it pass."

But it was not an easy thing to do. A few days after the words had been said, Kamba left on holiday for their village and although Tetu was kept busy doing not only his work but Kamba's also, the words came back to him and began to grow in his mind. He thought of Ruth and the brightness that came into her eyes when she

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looked at him. He could hear her small laugh and see her fine strong legs as she stretched high to pick the ripe coffee berries. It was five months since he had been home, and his yearning for her was great.

If Kamba had not been on leave he would have gone to the Memsab and asked her for time to make the trip home, but the rule of the house was that only one of the servants could be away.

Then when Tetu thought he would die for the hunger that burned in him, the Memsab told him that the family was going on safari and the house would be closed for a month. "Stay until tomorrow, Tetu, and make sure everything is clean for when we return. Then you may go home."

The hunger grew in him as he swept and washed and waxed and polished and when he finally boarded the bus he felt as though he was on fire.

The ride was long and it made him impatient. When they reached the highlands, the sun had just set and he saw that it had begun to rain. He prayed that the big rains would not come until after the bus had passed the stretch near the river, but even before they got there, the dirt road had become deep mud and the bus could not go on. There was nothing to do but sit and wait.

But Tetu had not been able to wait. The fire was in him and it would not let him stay. He left the bus and started to walk, through mud and rain, across the valley where the water rose over his knees. He kept on until his bones were chilled and his teeth would not stay quiet in his head.

When finally he had reached the edge of the village it was the middle of the night. No one was awake. No moon shone out of the rain-sodden sky. It was hours before the first cock would crow. Softly he stole into his house. He crossed the room where the children were sleeping and he stood for a moment, shivering, smelling their warmth mixed with the good smell of corn meal and the spices of the *posho* left in the cooking pot.

As he had taken off his rain-soaked clothes and dropped them in a corner on the floor, he listened to the children's quiet breathing, softened by the warm dark. It felt good to be home. Then softly, feeling his way, he had stepped into his wife's room. Even in the darkness he knew it. In the corner was a stool and next to it a large wooden box with beads that decorated its lid. Ruth kept her clothes there along with the shoes she had bought for her trip to the city. In front of it, just a step away, was the reed mat on which she slept.

He knelt down beside it and spoke in a whisper—soft words that he spoke only to her, words

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she would recognize as coming only from him. He had not wanted to frighten her. She was not expecting him, because only a few days ago Kamba had arrived in their village and she knew that the two of them could not be on holiday at the same time. For a moment Tetu thought of Kamba and how pleased he would be to know that the Europeans had gone on safari and he would not have to return to work for a month.

Then Tetu had leaned closer, gently reaching out to touch his wife's head, expecting the feel of the scarf she always wore over her closely shaved hair. His fingers had started at the touch of hair, coarse and crisp. He pulled his hand back and suppressed a cry. "In my haste, in my hunger, I have come into another house!"

He thought at once of his nakedness and quickly rose. As he stepped back his bare foot brushed the box behind him. He stood still for a moment, unsure. Then he bent down and passed his hand over the top of the box, feeling for the beads that decorated it. They rose under his exploring fingertips as real as live coals. No one in the village had a box like this—no one but his wife.

He stood still as stone. Only the breath in him moved. And in the darkness he heard a stirring and then a small frightened whisper. It was Ruth.

"There is a noise. Go! Go quickly!"

Then Tetu heard the rustle of cloth, a movement of limbs, and though he could see nothing, he knew a man had risen from the reed mat. With the swiftness of a green mamba the man left the room and was gone from the hut.

Tetu stood there, feeling the beat of his heart turn into a flame. It flared and blazed inside him, red glowing coals that set fire to his brain.

He fell upon his wife, the wife he had thought was only his, and his fingers found the small pulse in her throat and he felt it grow strong and wild and then faint and silent. Around him the blackness swirled and the rain fell.

He rose from the still form and stared unseeingly into the blinding dark. Slowly he moved into the other room where he had left his clothes. He shivered as he drew on his rain-cold trousers and his teeth began to chatter when he pulled on his wet shirt. He stepped into his shoes and walked out into the night.

When he reached the river road he saw through the rain that the bus was still where he had left it, stuck fast in the mud. Light had come into the sky, but still the rain fell and there was no sign of sun. He crept quietly inside. No one paid any attention to him; each of them, at some time during the long night, had had to step

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out into the mud and rain.

It was a whole day before the rains stopped and another day before the road dried—two days before the bus started on its way to his village. By then a fever raged in him and his tongue was a lump of charred coal in his mouth. Two men helped him off the bus. Kamba was there and took him to his house. A fire seemed to be burning everywhere, turning to ashes and then to dust. Water was poured down his throat and it boiled in his stomach, oozed out of his body, and left him shivering and cold at the edge of a rising river. And all the time the rain kept falling.

Then one day he had wakened and the fire was gone, washed away by the river, quenched by the rains. But the river was far away and it had not rained for many days. An old woman brought him water. He tried to speak but he sank back onto his mat and fell asleep, dreaming of the old crone. He thought she was his mother. But his mother had been dead a long time. Perhaps she was his wife.

Where was his wife? Why did she not bring him water? It was a wife's duty to care for her husband when he was sick. If a man had no wife, his mother took care of him, and if he had no mother, then he was left alone to care for himself—unless there was someone else... Now he knew the old woman. She was Kamba's mother. He was in Kamba's house.

The next time he woke Kamba was there, sitting beside him. Even without opening his eyes Tetu knew, because he smelled the sweetness of Kamba's oil and it made him feel sick. The feeling passed and he opened his eyes. He tried to speak, but he could not get his tongue to move.

"You have been sick a long time," Kamba said and began to tell him how it was two weeks since the bus had brought him to the village. "Two men carried you here."

Kamba gave him some water then, and the wetness of it seemed to unstick his tongue and he was able to speak, though slowly. "Why did they not take me to my own house? Where is my wife?"

A strange look seemed to come into Kamba's eyes and had he felt strong, Tetu would have sat up to look more closely.

"You do not remember?" he thought he heard Kamba say, but already he was beginning to sink back into sleep. He tried to stay awake, to think. He remembered washing windows and waxing floors and locking the European's house. He remembered buying his bus ticket and getting on board and looking out the window as the rain turned the road to mud. He remembered the mud and the rain and the cold. And then he remembered the old woman who

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was Kamba's mother, bringing him water to drink.

Through closed eyelids he felt Kamba lean over him. "I will come back later and we will talk," he heard Kamba say.

When he woke the next time, Tetu did not open his eyes right away. He wanted time to think before he spoke to Kamba. He was not in the room with him now, but he would know when he came in. Tetu felt there was trickery in what Kamba had said and though he did not know what the trick was or what he was expected to remember, he wanted time to think about it.

Someone came into the room and stood by his side. It was not Kamba, so Tetu opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the old woman. She stooped and gave him some soup from a small bowl. When she straightened she said, "I will call Kamba and tell him you are awake."

"Wait," he said reaching out to her with his hand. "Thank you, old friend, for all you have done for me. But tell me, where is my wife?"

Kamba's mother squinted down at him. "Has not Kamba told you?"

"He has not told me."

"Three days before you came to our village your wife died. She went to sleep at night and she did not wake up when morning came."

The fever came back and once more he was licked by its flames and drenched in his own sweat. But then one day it was over and he began to get well. It was longer than a month before he could return to the city, to the house where the Memsab was so sad to hear the news of his wife's death...

That had been almost a year ago and he did not talk about his wife, not to Kamba or to anyone. But today Kamba had spoken of her in a way that Tetu had not understood. And Kamba had spoken of the Memsab, too, saying that she was to blame for what had happened. How could the Memsab be to blame?

Tetu pushed the cover away and sat up in his bed. He lit a candle and looked at the small clock that stood on the box beside his bed. It was nine o'clock. Kamba was at the cinema now. Soon he would be going to Mary's. If only he had not let Kamba's words anger him. If only they had been friends today and gone off to town together. Then he too would be at the cinema now, and none of this would have happened.

Tetu shook his head. His thoughts were mixed up. This had not happened today. It had happened almost a year ago. He had just remembered it today. Kamba had known it all along. That was what he had meant when he said, "There are some things a brother

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knows about a brother that he cannot say, even to a brother."

Tetu got up from his bed and walked to the door of his room. He opened it. The night air was cool. There was a large moon in the sky. The light from it made the stars seem dim. It was not at all the same kind of night when the big rain had fallen and he had been cold and wet and hungry for his wife.

He remembered now—everything. The smell of the sleeping children mixed with the warm smell of *posho* left in the cooking pot. And then the scent of the sweet oil that had rubbed off Ruth's body onto his, that had clung to him, that even the rain had not been able to wash away.

Tears came to Tetu's eyes, tears he had not shed at his wife's death or at the Memsab's leaving. But he shed them now, at a brother's treachery, and Tetu's heart began to pound, knowing what he must do in payment.

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a NEW story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Florence V. Mayberry doesn't write nearly enough stories—not enough to suit readers of EQMM. But the ones she does write are always interesting, always unusual, always off the beaten track . . . This newest one is another strange tale—about Reno back in the 1930's, when it was, in some ways, a different kind of place . . .

NOT LOST ANY MORE

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

BACK IN THE THIRTIES, RENO had a feel about it like you could hold it in the cup of your hand. Small, sort of, and personal. Maybe 25,000 people lived there, both floating and permanent.

At the same time it had a big city way, a sense of the world streaming in and out. Rich Easterners—foreigners too, especially from Europe and Canada—came in for divorces. More rich ones in those days than poor. They put a kind of a gleam on the town. French-gowned women, London-tailored men, all polished by the confidence of well nourished bank accounts and carefully nurtured family trees.

Mixed in with the society folks were cowboys with worn boot heels, Piute women with papooses on their backs, and leather-skinned ranchers. In the night clubs, jeweled slippers danced toe to toe with cowboy boots.

Me, I was only the manager of a garage but I knocked around with characters that in other parts of the world I could only read about on the society pages. *If* I read them. For instance, one night I was at a party with Cornelius Vanderbilt and Peter Arno. That was before they had their big fight, staged or otherwise. A few times I ran into a real Countess from France. And off and on, one spell, I dated an English Lady —spell that with a capital L. She

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was a gas. Ate with her mouth open, talking all the time, and waving her fork with her left hand.

Reno was a ball in the thirties. I played the field, one date here, one date there, hopping from one pale-faced, red-lipsticked society divorcee to another. They didn't mind. They were lonely, and I made good enough money to take them around. And me—well, I had no intention of getting tied up.

Then I met Mary Allen.

I bumped into her late one afternoon in a bar. It took me about five minutes to tell her my name, Rob Forbes, and ask for hers.

"Why, I'm Miss Mary Allen," she said, grinning in a cute, sidewise way.

She was lying, of course, the little imp. She was Mrs. Mary Allen and she was in Reno for the Cure same as all the other divorcees I'd run into. Not that it would have mattered to me then, even if she had told me. Besides, I was lying myself. Like I told all my dates, I said I was married.

This may sound peculiar for a guy to say when he's trying to drum up future dates. But I used this line to keep from getting permanently hitched. I said I was married, but separated for several years. That I wanted to be honest and square right from the start—although I was permanently separated from my wife, circumstances would for a long, long time prevent a divorce. I didn't come right out and say it, but I gave the impression that some mysterious illness was involved. The old loyal approach. I told her I was just a small-town boy from Iowa. That part was true.

She wrinkled her nose, rolled her eyes, poked up two fingers on each side of her head and said, "Me, I'm a little ole lost mule roamed away from Missouri!" Mary was a nut, a cute kook. Along with big blue eyes ringed with black lashes, chestnut hair that bounced when she danced or walked, and a full laughing mouth, the kookiness went great.

I watched that hair bounce as I walked her home down Virginia Street. And when she told me good night in the lobby of her apartment house, those eyes pulled me right into them. The mouth bothered me, though, when I kissed it. It didn't lose its laugh.

"Why, sir!" she said. "We haven't even been properly introduced!" She flitted up the stairs, me right behind her. I tried to push with her through her apartment door.

She turned on me like a little whirlwind. "No!" she said, flat and loud. I backed up. She grinned and said, "Remember? I may be little. And I may be lost. But I'm a real Missouri mule. That means I kick too."

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"Okay, pardner," I said. "Have it your way. Us small-town boys get along real good with mules."

That was the beginning of Mary and me.

I didn't know it then, but she had only a little over three weeks left to become a Nevada resident and get her divorce. If I'd known I would have played it harder, faster. Instead I took it slow and easy.

Mary had a way of getting under my skin, crawling into my heart. When we walked along Virginia Street she'd grab my arm, swing on it like a kid, and flutter her eyes at me exaggeratedly. A big game she made of it. Just so everyone who passed us would stare at the kooky dame who'd gone off her rocker for the great big wonderful man. She'd even giggle and skip. I'd say, "Behave yourself, or I'll spank you right here in the middle of the street!"

"I'll be good, I'll be good," she'd promise, dropping her eyes and maybe walking pigeon-toed, finger in her mouth. Or she'd draw up to her full five feet one and stride, as best she could, like a dowager stalking past the rabble. You never could be sure what she'd do next. Except that, one way or another, she was always playing, always laughing. And I laughed with her.

She bugged some of my friends, the fellows. They swore she laughed because she figured she was one up on everybody. Me, I think they were just plain jealous. She never dated any of them. To me, the fellow she did date, she was adorable.

Take that day we went up to Lake Tahoe. It was winter. Snow was heavy on the pines. All the country was white and pure and so hushed you could hear your blood throbbing, and the pine and frost were sharp in your nose.

Even the fellows Mary bugged admitted she was a beauty. But this day, at Tahoe, she was—even now it hurts to remember how beautiful she looked that day. She had on a fluffy white sweater and a tasseled cap, and white trousers. Black boots, heavy enough to plow through the snow. Her shining hair curled around the cap like a halo. And those blue, blue eyes dancing and shining.

I remember her hands got so cold that I rubbed them. Her feet too. I knelt down in the hotel lobby while we were waiting for the dining room to announce our table for lunch, took off her boots, and rubbed her feet. It was like petting a doll that was miraculously alive. I swear, I had trouble not bending to kiss those little feet.

By this time, you see, I was nuts about her. Maybe that was why, in the past, I had fought so shy of getting permanently tangled up with women. Subcon-

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sciously I must have known that when love struck me it would be lightning. All the way, around the bend, over the hill, and gone. Forever.

"Mary," I said, still rubbing her feet, kneeling, looking up at her, "I've been lying to you. I'm not married. That's why I left home and came out west. I was afraid I would get married. There was a girl there. Well, my folks were crazy about her, and if I had stayed any longer I might have married her. Thank God I didn't. Because it's you I love, Mary. You're the girl I want to marry. I didn't know it before, but you're what I've waited and looked for all my life."

She blinked her eyes. Then she threw back her head, cupped those little pink hands around her mouth. "Tootle-oo, tootle-oo, tootle-oo!" Softly, but like a trumpet. Like a hunt call. "Let's up and away, the fox is at play, he's turned and headed the other way! Hounds, look out!"

Sure it hurt. But that was her way. Always working for the funny side. I kept rubbing her feet until they were warm. She bent and tickled my face with the long tassel of her white cap.

"Naughty foxy," she whispered. "You're a Georgie-Porgie—'kiss the girls and make them cry'."

I caught her arms and looked level into her eyes. "Tease me today and I'll grab you and run off to the hills with you! And never come back! Mary, let's get married. Today."

Right then the dining room called out my name. Mary sprang up and walked quickly to our table, with me behind her. The place was packed with skiers and week-enders from California and Nevada. The tables were pushed so close together that everyone practically sat in each other's lap. And noisy. No place for love talk. I could scarcely eat, I was so anxious to get outside and away from people. Just Mary and me.

We walked away from the hotel through deep snow. Like walking on white velvet, so soft, no sound. We walked through tree groves, until they became guards, keeping the world away. I bent and kissed Mary. When I raised my face she had no laugh, not even a smile. Her chin was trembling.

"Now you've gone and done it, Robbie, you've gone and finished us." Her voice broke. "I knew how you felt, but why did you have to tell me! Now I'll have to tell you something. I'm married. I came here for a divorce."

"What's wrong with that? I don't care if you've been married to a hundred guys. I love you."

Her mouth crumpled. That tore me up. "Robbie, I'm not going to get a divorce. My husband's coming out to talk things over. But I've already decided. I don't

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want a divorce. It's because I don't like sad things, Robbie, that I didn't tell you. It was going to hurt you. I was just going to —to disappear."

"Mary, you can't. You've got to marry me."

She shook her head. "He's the one I love. You and I—oh, I do love you, Robbie, next to him. But I never thought it would get really serious, it was only fun for a little while. Remember—" an impish grin flitted over her face —"I was helping you be loyal to your poor sick wife. But that's over. I love my husband and I want to go home."

"When is he coming?" It was tough to get the words out. Once when I cracked a rib playing hockey, my chest felt like that.

"Day after tomorrow. So now—it's best we say goodbye today."

"On the train?" People didn't use airplanes much back then.

"Driving," she said, her face lighting up like a holiday was coming. "All the way from Missouri." Then she put up her fingers the way she had when I first met her. "I'm a little ole mule from Missouri. But, Robbie, I'm not lost any more."

When I left her at her door I didn't kiss her. I was afraid to.

The car with Missouri license plates drove up in front of Mary's apartment house. A tall dark man got out. Good-looking, I suppose. The print of a lot of laughing was on his face too. Kind of a one-sided slant to his features like they were grin-twisted. Two laughing ones in the same family maybe left nobody for an audience.

I started out of the garage—not mine, the one I managed, but a friend's. I'd been hanging around there all day, saying I had the day off but was taking a busman's holiday. Before I could cross the street this Allen guy was up the steps and inside.

The garage closed at six and I pretended to walk up the street, as if I was going home, until the fellows were all gone. Then I went back and stood in the deep recessed doorway of the garage. It was freezing, I was cold to the bone. Yet in the pit of my stomach it was fire and brimstone, mixed with the taste of bile.

It was three hours before they came out of the apartment lobby. Down the steps.

I stepped out of the doorway. "Mary Allen!" I called. Loud.

They stopped, startled. "Oh, Stu honey," Mary said, quick as a flash, "Stuart, I want you to meet a good friend, Rob—"

She saw the gun. "Stop! Don't be an idiot! You fool! You can't be—"

I was pulling the trigger. This Stuart staggered back.

Not from the bullet. From the weight of Mary's body. And Mary

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was on the sidewalk, her face white and still. How can a face get that white and still in just one second? Oh, Mary, you were the idiot, you were the fool! Why did you shove him? My God, I never wanted to kill *you*. Only stop him from having you.

That's what my lawyer pleaded. Accidental homicide. Intent to kill another, yes. That was no secret. Stuart Allen made that clear, how Mary screamed and pushed him out of the way when she saw me aim. So they gave me 50 years. That would make me 77 when I got out, too old and worn out to start over again.

With good behavior, my lawyer said I might get a pardon after a few years. I behaved, but they forgot about me. I stayed in 35 years. Two months ago they let me out.

Reno's not the same. Now it's just a big carnival, with the gambling houses hawking their wares like old-time barkers. No style.

And no Mary.

Stuart Allen, my lawyer told me, had stayed in Reno. Got to liking it during the trial. He stayed and married again. He should have gone back to Missouri.

He didn't recognize me when I went into his real-estate office. Not even when I put my hand in my pocket and struggled a little, like I was going for something, maybe a gun, and it got caught on a lining. He just smiled in an off-hand way, pleasant, and asked what he could do for me.

So I took out my handkerchief and wiped my hands. Said I wanted listings on apartments to rent, that I'd just come back to town after a long absence. When he asked for my name and I told him, I thought he'd drop. That one-sided smile froze on his face. Like he'd had a stroke. Like an old, sick man. As old and white-headed as me.

"Get out!" he said.

I smiled. But I'm not a funny man. I expect I looked mean. "Okay. But I'll be stopping by again. When you get more listings. We'll probably bump into each other real often. Now that we're both good citizens."

That's what I had in mind. No more shooting. Just bug him to death. Walk by his office every day or so. The sidewalk's free; it's no parole violation to walk on it. Bump into him sort of accidentally on purpose. Maybe not say anything. Just look. With all the pent-up brooding of 35 years.

I was opening the door to leave when he called, "Wait!" He stood up, that one-sided grin unfreezing and his eyes looking inside himself, seeing something secretly funny.

"It's not hard to read you," he said. "You're a one-track man. Still holding a grudge against me for the mess you got yourself

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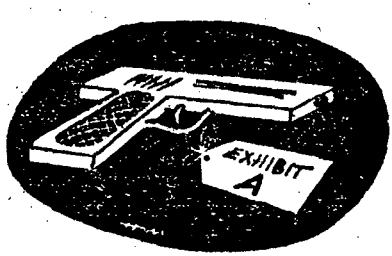
into. I didn't kill Mary. You did. And if you had shot me instead of her, what kind of screwball reasoning would have put you in the clear so you could have had her? You would have gone to the pen just the same. Or the death house. But probably no reasoning was involved. So now you're out to hound me, one way or another."

He took a deep breath. "Maybe this will finally poke it through your skull what a fool you are. Mary had decided against our divorce. But I hadn't. I was the one who wanted a divorce. The girl I loved wasn't Mary. But Mary was going to be stubborn and not get the divorce. I came here to reason with her, explain again how we were rubbing each other raw."

"You mean—" The next words jammed in my throat. I coughed them loose. "You mean, what I did—helped you get rid of Mary?"

Shock tightened his features. "That's a pretty rough way of putting it." Then, slowly, the one-sided grin returned. "But you said it. I didn't."



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FIRST PRIZE WINNER NUMBER 9

Roy Vickers, First Prize Winner of 1953, was the creator of the Department of Dead Ends, the pertinacious, elephant-memoried bureau of Scotland Yard, and the most brilliant practitioner of the "inverted detective story" of our generation. His First Prize story is not a tale of the Department of Dead Ends, but it is blood-brother, almost the identical twin, of that great series. Chief Inspector Thurtle in *Double Image* could be the guiding genius of the D.D.E., and the story itself has the same authenticity of photographic detail, the same imaginative realism, shot through with credible fantasy, which occurs so often in real life. But *Double Image* is more: it is a tour de force in the truest sense of the term.

From the first page of this story you will walk a 'tec tight-rope, precariously balanced between the believable and the unbelievable—or as one of the important characters says near the end: "I believed one thing—then I believed the opposite—then back again."

In *Double Image* the author proved (and it is strange that writers must continue to prove the point again and again) that there are no rules of technique or taboos of subject matter which cannot be broken by a talented craftsman—indeed, we have often insisted that the only true value of "don'ts" is that they give the really creative writer the challenge to "do"...

DOUBLE IMAGE

by ROY VICKERS

THERE ARE SOME TRUTHS WHICH the public invariably labels fictional. For instance, the Fanshaw murder mystery pivoted on the murderer being so like Julian Fanshaw that the latter's wife, Elsa, could fail to notice the difference. The public, bypassing the evidence, said that no wife could make that mistake and wondered

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why the police believed such a childish tale. The police, of course, do not commonly accept a tall tale in lieu of an alibi ...

Seen from the outside, the Fanshaws were an ordinary young couple who lived in the well-appointed suburb of Rubington. They had a pleasant eight-room house, with more than half an acre of garden. A strange talent for getting and keeping competent help insured a smooth domesticity.

In the first week in October, Elsa announced at breakfast that she was going to Town for a day's shopping.

Her husband said he would squeeze in the time to have lunch with her at Blainley's Restaurant, at one o'clock. On the train she fell in with a neighbor, Gwenda Blagrove, and eventually brought her along to Blainley's, believing that her husband would be pleased, as Gwenda's husband had been of use to Fanshaw in the city.

The Fanshaws' marriage had been satisfactory, so far. Elsa was sufficiently good-looking to seem beautiful to any man who liked her mental and emotional make-up. She kept her moods to herself. So did her husband. True, they had settled into a job trot of absent-minded affection. He had ceased to notice her dress and she had taught herself to laugh at the right time without actually listening to his stories. For five years they had rippled along, stretching their income but avoiding really dangerous debt. A substantial sum, which would revert to Julian on the death of an uncle, discouraged saving.

The two women turned up at the restaurant ahead of time. At eleven minutes to one they were waiting in the entrance hall, which was somewhat crowded. At nine minutes to one Elsa exclaimed, "There's Julian! He hasn't seen us, but he's coming this way."

Julian Fanshaw was easy to pick out of a crowd, so Elsa always saw him before he saw her. He was taller than most men and he had the well-developed chest and overdeveloped shoulder muscles that come from rowing for one's university. His face was large, lean, and amiable, with a dimple in his chin. He went to a good tailor and his lounge suits were always of the same steely gray—the precise shade of which, Elsa said, she had never seen on any other man. His lightweight overcoats were cut from the same material. There was a touch of individuality even in his broad-brimmed homburg.

"He has seen you, but not me," corrected Gwenda—a trivial remark which later acquired a certain importance. "We'd better stand still, or we shall be dodging each other."

The tall man with the steely gray clothes and the dimpled chin was weaving toward them.

"Julian! I've persuaded Gwenda

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to join us for lunch. We were both—"

The man she addressed did not ignore her. He seemed to assume that she was speaking across him to someone else. He looked into her eyes, doffed his hat, gave her a stranger's smile, murmured "Sorry!" and moved toward the cloakroom, leaving Elsa to gape at the overdeveloped shoulder muscles under the gray overcoat. The overcoat seemed to be not quite the same, but she couldn't be sure.

Gwenda was muttering to herself. Elsa looked frightened.

"You thought it was Julian, too," Elsa almost whispered. "You were just going to speak to him."

"It *was* Julian! You can't mistake another man for your own husband!"

"But I did! Though when he turned his back I did think the overcoat was of a different material, even if it was practically the same shade."

"His overcoat! Has Julian a twin brother?"

"No. He is a twin, but the other died when they were babies. It must be his double."

"Nobody can be as double as that!"

Yet, there it was. Elsa felt as many have felt immediately after an accident—that she must force herself backward in time to the moment before it happened. Gwenda was still explaining about doubles when—at six minutes to one—Elsa felt a hand on her arm.

Julian again? Or just Julian?

"Julian! I've persuaded Gwenda to join us for lunch." She was saying it over again. "We were both going to the same shops—"

"Splendid! Sorry you've been waiting but I'm still five minutes to the good. I'll just dump my coat."

After a civil exchange with Gwenda he hurried off before they could tell him about the other Julian. Elsa brought it up at lunch. In spite of Gwenda's corroboration, it sounded like a small-talk exaggeration. Julian mumbled politely about it.

"But don't you see it's terrific!" cried Gwenda. "Elsa was as sure as I was that it was you! She says you actually are a twin."

"Yes, that does give a tang to it," grinned Julian. "Unfortunately, my twin lived for only two days, statutory—my father told me it was twenty-six hours."

"Were you born at home?"

"We were born at St. Seiriol's."

"Where hundreds are born every day."

"Not hundreds every day—tens, perhaps. I can guess what you're thinking. But a mix-up of babies is such a likely thing to happen that it would be happening almost daily—if they didn't have a foolproof system for tabbing them. Nothing there!"

At home that evening Elsa's chatter lost its bubble.

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"What's on your mind, darling? You were shopping today. If someone has stopped your credit we can probably fix it up."

"It's that double of yours. You didn't really listen when Gwenda and I told you about him. He almost brushed against me. Our eyes met and I *still* thought he was you. He said 'Sorry' in the same muttering tone you use. And he was dressed in exactly your gray, with the same cut, though the material itself may have been different. It's as if he must have been your identical twin."

Julian frowned. "Apart from anything else, we have no evidence that my twin brother was an identical. So, darling, you won't start something on that, will you? I mean the one about the nurses having changed the babies and one day the true earl turns up to claim the titles and estate. At the moment we have neither title nor estate for a missing heir to claim. Anyway, I am the older brother."

"You're laughing at me!"

"Just a little. I don't disbelieve your yarn. Only, there's nothing we can do about it except keep on agreeing that it's most extraordinary. So let's forget it."

On the evening of the following day Julian, who was very regular in his habits, failed to appear at the usual time. Within an hour Elsa was waiting on the porch.

"Julian! Has something awful happened?"

"My dear girl! I'm barely an hour late. Just missed the train, that's all. I had a slack afternoon, so I thought I'd pop around the corner for a heart-to-heart talk with Uncle Ernest. The awful thing—if any—is that he is in rude health. We shall be middle-aged before we benefit."

Later in the evening he expanded. "Things have been rather tight the last six months. Some of my best clients are asking for longer credit, and they ought to have it. Obviously, the sensible thing is for me to realize at least part of my interest under the reversion. I can't do it without Uncle Ernest's consent. So I offered to pay him five hundred if he would authorize me to borrow ten thousand. It's pure gain for him—he loses nothing and risks nothing."

"How did he take it?"

"He was very sour. Gave me a pijaw about living too extravagantly. I told him we didn't—because we don't!"

"I could manage with only Mrs. Benson. And we could do nearly all the gardening ourselves."

"We could not. And it isn't necessary. There's no crisis. It's simply that I'm pegged down for lack of a spot of extra capital."

Which was only a different way of putting it, thought Elsa.

"Julian! Never mind how silly I am, please answer! If that man really *is your twin—in spite of all* the reasons why he can't be—

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would he share in the money on your uncle's death?"

"If I had a brother, which I have not, we would split." Julian was scornful. "On the utterly fantastic premise that my brother is alive, why doesn't he show up and make a fuss about it? Why lurk about and dress like me and play bogeyman at you?"

They talked no more about the double until the following evening, when Mrs. Hebbleton rang Elsa.

To the extent that Rubington possessed a social leader, Mrs. Hebbleton filled the role. Of moderate intelligence and immoderate energy she became president or secretary of most local activities, and enjoyed every minute of it.

"Mrs. Hebbleton says she buttonholed you near the railway station yesterday evening—"

"She did not!"

"—that you had come off the 6:05 as usual, that you accepted for us to dine there next Thursday, and that she handed you the nominal roll of the tennis club to give to me, and I'd promised to do some of the letters."

Julian was obliged to admit that this must be the handiwork of the double.

"That chap," said Julian, "is playing a game of his own. Turning up at Blainley's when you were there *and* doing this stunt in Rubington where you live—both can no longer be chance. Why didn't he tell Mrs. Hebbleton his name isn't Fanshaw?"

"But supposing it is?"

"Don't bring that up again, darling. Whatever his name is, we're going to look silly."

Next day, over morning coffee, Mrs. Hebbleton came to the point.

"Gwenda told me an extraordinary story about your mistaking another man for your husband, though what use our nominal roll can be to him if he is *not* your husband—"

"Gwenda mistook him, too," put in Elsa.

"In a crowded restaurant, perhaps," conceded Mrs. Hebbleton. "But I'm sure that you will understand that I must ask you to prepare another nominal roll."

"I will, with pleasure. But Gwenda was as close to him as I was."

"It's all very peculiar indeed, but I shall expect you both on Thursday, all the same," said Mrs. Hebbleton magnanimously. "If there really is a double impersonating your husband I imagine you will take steps."

"I don't see what we can do."

"Do you think it's ever true that one can do nothing?" said Mrs. Hebbleton. "Why not apply to the police for protection? Superintendent Norris is a very capable man. If you care to mention my name I'm sure he'll do something for you."

Thus goaded, Elsa unfolded her tale to the Superintendent, who

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disconcerted her by making notes.

"Let's take the restaurant incident first, Mrs. Fanshaw. Between the two appearances, you tell me, there was an interval of three minutes. In that time Mr. Fanshaw could—I don't say he did, mind—I say he *could* have gone out by a side door and come in again by the main door. To play a practical joke on you ladies. And he might have been continuing the joke with Mrs. Hebbleton. By the way, I suppose Mr. Fanshaw hasn't a twin brother?"

"He did have"—and Elsa told the tale about the short-lived baby.

"Then that's out of it," said the Superintendent, nevertheless making a note of it.

"Mrs. Hebbleton," said Elsa to her husband that night, "thinks she runs Rubington, because she's rumored to be a cousin of the Duke of Sheffield. Before marriage her name was Jennifer Maud Carmaenham. I wish you'd look her up in *Who's Who*—there's sure to be a copy at your club."

"Aren't you being catty, darling?"

"Yes, and I'm liking it. She as good as said that there's no double—that it's only you playing the fool. And she practically forced me to go to the local police." She added an account of her interview with the Superintendent.

Julian's reaction was disappointing. In silence he took a postcard from his pocket, on which he made calculations of time.

"The Superintendent is on solid ground," he pronounced. "The attitude of that woman is asinine, of course, but we can't defend ourselves. I can't prove I was somewhere else at the relevant times." He added gloomily, "This might damage us quite a lot. If that chap crops up again, I shall consider asking legal advice."

The next incident touched on the business relations of the Fanshaws, uncle and nephew.

Julian was a slow-transport agent. If you wished to move a wardrobe or a ton of fertilizer or whatnot to the next town, or to an obscure island in the Pacific, without incurring the cost of express delivery, Julian Fanshaw was your man. He had maps and technical charts showing the most inexpensive way of sending goods from almost any spot on earth to almost any other.

Ernest Fanshaw, who was a fuel agent specializing in the less common fuels, occasionally employed the services of his nephew. As their offices were within a minute's walk they were in the habit of calling on each other and doing their business personally, to preserve the family courtesies.

John Thwaites, Ernest Fanshaw's elderly head clerk, who had many of the qualities of a family retainer, was shocked when Julian presented himself at three

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in the afternoon and asked if his uncle were disengaged.

Mr. Thwaites looked surprised.

"But Mr. Julian! He's very busy just now, and he wasn't really pleased when you dropped in this morning to see him."

"But I did *not* drop in this morning!"

The clerk, after careful scrutiny, could find no sign of excessive drinking.

"Mr. Julian, I myself showed you in."

"Mr. Thwaites, this is damned serious!"

Julian strode into the private office and opened the door. Ernest Fanshaw, who had been dozing in his chair, opened his eyes and blinked.

"Sorry, Uncle. Thwaites says he showed me into this room this morning. I was not here this morning. I have been impersonated. I'll tell you all about it—"

After some confusion they reached bedrock.

"Let us be precise," said Ernest Fanshaw. "On Tuesday afternoon you called here to make an improper offer about the reversion. This morning, sitting where you are sitting now, you tried a new approach to the same subject. Before you left this room I produced your account for the sum of forty-three pounds, twelve shilling, apologizing for having neglected to settle it before, and gave you a check for that amount. Are you telling me you have forgotten? Feel in your pocket."

"Uncle Ernest! If it was a check made out to cash, you've probably lost your money. If it was a check made out to me, phone the bank now and have it stopped."

When the bank had been warned, Julian told his tale, to which his uncle listened with impatience.

"I've never heard anything so damned ridiculous! This double—as you call him—how the devil could he know anything about that reversion?"

"I haven't the ghost of a notion, but I do know that he has nosed out a lot of details of my business and domestic affairs. He has made a fool of me in Rubington, impersonating me to our friends."

It was his nephew's tone that impressed Ernest and inclined him to take notice.

"Julian, it has suddenly struck me—d'you think it possible that something slipped in the hospital and that your twin brother—"

"I've given up guessing. After this I shall see my lawyer and hit back if I can."

Julian told Elsa about it—then slipped in the unwelcome information that *Who's Who* fully authenticated Mrs. Hebbleton's claim to be the cousin of a duke.

"Anyhow, she'll have to believe now that there's a double, duke or no duke."

A couple of days later, Miss

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Hackett, Julian's secretary, came into his room looking slightly offended. He had first met Miss Hackett when he was a small boy on a visit to the office. On his father's sudden death, while Julian was at Cambridge, she had proved herself a very competent manager. She was content to continue as Julian's secretary and office aunt.

"Mr. Thwaites has been on the phone with a very mysterious message," she said, with disapproval. "Your uncle asks you to meet him at his bank in ten minutes. It's very urgent. And there is no explanation."

In the bank manager's room Julian was shown the check for £43 12/, which had been cashed through a Post Office savings account.

"The endorsement certainly looks like my signature. But I know that I did not endorse that check, and anyway I have no Post Office account, so I declare the endorsement a forgery."

The bank manager, applying a routine test, agreed that the signature had been traced and insisted on calling the police. Julian, eager to cooperate, volunteered to go with the police to the branch Post Office, warning them that he would be identified as the forger. They were so alike, he told them, that his own wife had made a mistake.

Pursuing the twin-brother theory the police visited St. Seiriol's Hospital, Westminster, where Julian had been born. The records showed that there had been five male babies born within an hour of the twins and a total of eleven males and seven females—with one male death—within 26 hours. But the routine for preventing a confusion of babies was so thorough that the possibility of a mistake was untenable.

There remained the thin chance that a nurse might have tampered with the routine, robbing the mother of twins in pity for the bereaved mother of a singleton. So the police worked on the list of nurses and patients of 29 years ago. Five of the nurses had died, and more than half the number of parents were untraceable.

They interviewed Elsa and were impressed. Gwenda Blagrove's testimony added nothing. Mrs. Hebbleton challenged them to explain why the double should want the nominal roll of the tennis club. The local Superintendent agreed that it was incredible that Mr. Fanshaw should play such a clownish trick on his uncle, and promised to keep a sharp lookout in Rubington.

After a blank week the papers of the case came before Chief Inspector Thurtle, who sent a courteous request to Julian to call at Scotland Yard.

Thurtle had the appearance of a prosperous family man who is bullied by his daughters. Many of

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his earlier successes were due to his talent for inspiring confidence.

"Our chief difficulty is that all roads lead back to you, Mr. Fanshaw—such as that Post Office clerk identifying you yourself as the double. I thought pr'aps you'd like to let us have your finger-prints—for your own sake."

Julian thanked him and had his prints taken.

"Forty-three quid odd," resumed Thurtle, "seems a very poor target for an elaborate stunt like this. He dresses himself up like you, and that alone would cost more than thirty. And why does he force himself on your wife's attention at a restaurant? And why the practical joke on Mrs. Hebbleton? Of course, we have to deal with the fact of forgery. But, between you and me, it looks more like a hoax. That suggests he may be your twin brother nursing a grievance, in spite of what the hospital people say."

Julian was unresponsive. "If he's my brother, why doesn't he show up in a friendly way? He would have a strong moral claim on us."

"Would he be entitled to any money?"

"There's no immediate money. But there's a reversion on my uncle's death—about fifty thousand pounds—which he would share equally with me."

Thurtle said this was important and took a note of details.

"We have to find a means of separating your movements from his, Mr. Fanshaw. Now, he was getting that check out of your uncle at about twenty past twelve on the morning of the fourteenth. You were in your office at that time, I suppose?"

"Probably—just a minute!" Julian produced a pocket diary. "The fourteenth . . . I have an entry—*Who's Who*—" He smiled. "My wife had asked me to look up a social reference. So I went to my club, leaving the office at twelve. I walked, so I must have got there—The Junior Commonwealth, Mendover Street—about ten past."

"Can you give me something to check on, just for the record?" Then Thurtle added, "That's a large club and I don't suppose the staff ticks off every member—there'd be a good many coming in at that time. You had lunch with somebody?"

"N-no, I had a standup in the snack bar—don't remember running into any of my own clique there. On the way to the reading room I nodded to one or two acquaintances. I doubt if they'll remember."

They did not remember. Thurtle's checkup at the club yielded no one, of membership or staff, who could state positively that Julian Fanshaw was or was not there on the fourteenth.

Thurtle followed up with inquiries in Rubington, intensive but fruitless. He called on Ernest Fan-

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shaw and enlisted the latter's co-operation. Then he sent Fanshaw another equally courteous request to call at the Yard.

When Julian had seated himself and accepted a cigarette, Thurtle reported his total lack of progress in any direction—then waited for Julian to say something.

"Awkward for me." Julian braced himself. "Let's face it, Inspector. Like Mrs. Hebbleton, you suspect that I have played my own 'double' as a practical joke?"

"Not as a practical joke."

Julian looked puzzled.

Thurtle went on: "Take the buildup of this 'double' of yours—or identical twin, if you like. He must have staged the incident at Blainley's Restaurant—same applies to Mrs. Hebbleton and her tennis papers—and to that prank with the forty-three quid check. Builds up a half lunatic who might do anything." Thurtle paused. "For instance, he might murder your uncle—and leave you to collect the fifty thousand quid."

Julian removed his cigarette and stared at it.

"Let's take this slowly, Inspector. You don't believe this fellow exists. You suggest that 'he' might murder my uncle—meaning that *I* might murder my uncle—"

"Put it this way, Mr. Fanshaw. I'm warning you that if you have any such fantasy in your brain you'd do well to get rid of it."

Julian laughed loudly and long.

"It's a great idea, Inspector! I scupper Uncle Ernest and plant the murder on a ghost!"

"Just so. Our job is to prevent crime, when we can."

"You do it very thoroughly," sighed Julian. "If I had had any such plan—fantasy, you rightly called it—you would have dished it."

He got up and moved toward the door.

"The police have done a lot of work on this job—which you believe to be a hoax on my part. Am I to be charged with 'creating a public mischief'—if that's what it's called?"

"We have no immediate intention of making that charge, Mr. Fanshaw."

"Haven't you?" Julian smiled. *"I wonder why!"*

There were no developments during the next fortnight. Elsa no longer asked every evening if there was news of the double. Routine was restored. Fifteen days after the incident of the forged check Julian announced that he intended to go to Manchester the following afternoon—a Tuesday—in hope of nailing an important new client, and that he would stay overnight, returning home at the usual time on Wednesday evening.

In the middle of Tuesday afternoon Elsa heard a latchkey and ran into the hall.

"Julian! I thought you were go-

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ing to Manchester today?"

"Washout. Phone call just as I was leaving the office. I had made arrangements with Miss Hackett, so I thought I'd knock off work just the same."

"What've you done with your suitcase, Julian?" Her voice was the least bit unsteady.

"Damn! Left it at the office."

Mrs. Benson was making a clatter in the kitchen. Even so, she would hear a scream. Elsa saw that he had guessed her thought. He looked angry, but she did not flinch.

"How do I know you *are* Julian?"

"You don't, I guess. And you never will know, because there's no means of telling you. 'I am myself'—what the devil does it mean? Nothing!" His anger seemed to be lost in self-pity. "I am not just like one man but thousands. My conversation is the same as theirs, my habits, my very gestures. And we all whisper the same things to our wives. Why is it remarkable that some of us should have the same face?" He laughed as a man who laughs at himself. "But if it's the problem of my face that's worrying you, perhaps you noticed at breakfast this morning that I had nicked myself while shaving. Look closely—left side, near the ear—and if you can find a trace of the nick, treasure it. It's my solitary claim to individuality."

"Don't work yourself up over nothing, Julian." Elsa felt ashamed of herself. "After all, I was wrong about you once."

"Sorry, darling. It was your question that upset me. I thought you meant it seriously. Perhaps you did—don't tell me! The truth is, this wretched 'double' business is getting us down. Let's snap out of it for a few hours. I vote we have a nice, noisy evening in Town. Elsa—*Elsa!*" His voice pushed aside the five years of jog trot, leaving her dizzy.

They used the car, to eliminate the rush for the last train. Neighbors, the Brigstocks, saw them dining at Blainley's, and thought that they seemed absorbed in each other—which was true.

They went to a musical show and afterward to a night club. He noticed her dress. She listened to his stories and laughed because she was amused. She set herself to engage his whole attention. When they had returned to Rubington she was still effervescent. They were acutely conscious of each other.

Next morning he was the first up and about. By the time Elsa came downstairs Mrs. Benson had brought in breakfast and placed his overcoat and hat in readiness for him in the hall—the staff was always devoted to Julian. A thin beam of sunlight, filtering through the glass panel in the front door, rested on the overcoat.

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Elsa looked at the coat—then passed on as if she had not seen it. On the hall table, as usual, was a copy of the *Times*. She opened a drawer, took out an ancient pair of scissors with which she would often cut out the crossword puzzle before Julian whisked it off to the office—and the next instant turned back to the coat. It was the right shade; but the material, she thought, was different—the same difference she had noted in the coat of the 'double' that day at Blainley's Restaurant.

"How utterly ridiculous! It's the effect of the sun on it!" The thought was unspoken, but she laughed aloud—laughed a second time as she stopped herself from fingering the material. She positively bounced into breakfast.

She began to chatter. She made a casual remark about one of their friends. His mumbled answer confused her by its irrelevance. Her thoughts flew back to the coat in the hall. In the next few seconds she felt the blood rushing in her head. She steadied herself, pushed back her chair. The same words came unbidden.

"How do I know you *are* Julian?"

Their eyes met, fanning her panic.

"You can say that to me, Elsa, after all that has passed between us—since yesterday afternoon?"

"*You're stalling!*" It was almost a whisper. "If you're Julian, tell me the name of my bridesmaid—the pet name we've always used."

"A test question!" He laughed. "After five years and two months of marriage you need a password to tell you the difference between your husband and another man of the same appearance. It proves what I was saying yesterday—"

"Why don't you answer?"

"For one of two reasons. Either I am not your husband and don't know the answer. Or I am your husband and see no point in answering. Think it over, Elsa, and you'll find that it doesn't matter a damn to you whether I'm Julian Fanshaw or his twin brother."

He got up and walked out.

Elsa sagged in her chair. Had she insulted both Julian and herself? It was one thing to mistake the other man for Julian for a few seconds in Blainley's Restaurant. But last night! As if she could have the slightest doubt! Why, the thing was a psychological absurdity! She did not move until Mrs. Benson came in to clear the breakfast table.

Toward the end of the morning it dawned on her that she could remove all doubt by ringing his office. But she must choose her words carefully. Secretaries were very careful of what they said to wives about husbands.

She looked up the train schedule to Manchester. There was a dining-car express arriving in London

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at 2:45. Julian would take that train—*if* he were in Manchester.

"Oh, Miss Hackett!" she was saying at a few minutes past two. "Is Julian back yet?"—a question which might have referred to lunch.

"No, Mrs. Fanshaw. He said he would probably take the midday express from Manchester, so he should be here about three. Shall I ask him to ring you?"

"No, thanks—it's of no importance, and I shall be out at three."

So much for the psychological absurdity! All emotion had spent itself and she faced with detachment the riddle of what to say to Julian.

Actually, she said nothing. Julian came home at the usual time. Watching him from the window she thought he looked haggard. When she met him in the hall he burst into a heartiness that was wholly unconvincing.

"Hullo, darling! Had a good day? I came down with Brigstock. Says he saw us at Blainley's last night—they were three tables away, apparently—couldn't catch our eye—eyes, I mean. I told him you and I were having an evening out together for a change. Not a bad evening either, eh? Shan't be long."

He hurried upstairs, carrying his suitcase. She had said nothing, and he had not noticed her silence.

He had picked up the truth from Brigstock, she concluded, and wished to spare her feelings. But perhaps that was not quite his style—in their five years, all his little kindnesses had been trumpeted. More probably he found the facts humiliating to himself and wished to avoid discussion. She would play along.

On the last Monday in November, six weeks after the incident of the forged check, Ernest Fanshaw's head clerk overheard what he took to be the voice of Julian Fanshaw speaking to the reception girl. Through the window he noted the steely gray overcoat and the wide-brimmed homburg affected by Julian Fanshaw, and under his arm a folded newspaper, obviously the *Times*. The clocks were striking eleven.

"Good morning, Mr. Thwaites. Do you think Uncle Ernest could spare me five minutes, or are you working him too hard?"

"Ah! Your uncle doesn't need anybody to make him work." He spoke on the office telephone. "Mr. Julian is here, sir ... Very good, sir. Will you go right through, Mr. Julian."

Ernest Fanshaw had been compelled by the logic of events to accept the idea of "the double"—which was repugnant to him. But as his inner door opened he forgot the double and saw only his nephew. He also forgot the arrangement made with Inspector Thurtle—which Thwaites was at

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that moment putting into action.

"Well, Julian. I hope you haven't come to talk about that reversion again?"

"Not literally, Uncle. The reversion can remain in the background of our thoughts." Julian spoke with one eye on the inner door, as if he expected interruption. "I want you to make me a personal loan of a thousand pounds."

The proposition was not fully expanded before the head clerk came in without knocking. He handed his employer a folded slip.

Ernest Fanshaw studied the slip with undisguised astonishment. He stared at his caller. Then he stared at his clerk.

"All right, Thwaites. Go ahead."

Before the clerk had shut the door, the slip, which had been refolded, was snatched from Ernest Fanshaw's fingers.

"What have we here, Uncle?" He read the message aloud: "'By phone as directed: Miss Hackett states that Mr. Julian Fanshaw is in his office at this moment. J. Thwaites.' I guessed it—your face gave you away. So Thwaites is ringing the police, eh?"

"What happens to you will depend largely on the evidence I give about that check. You're Julian's twin, aren't you?"

"So I believe. Taking myself at my face value and adding a few dates and places." He began to open out the copy of the *Times* which he had brought with him. "There's an article here—"

"Sit down, sir! No doubt you believe yourself to have been ill-used. You may have been, but not by our family. In the circumstances I am prepared to—"

The extent of Ernest Fanshaw's intended benevolence was never known, because, at that moment, he died in mid-sentence without even an audible groan. He was killed with an Army dagger, by the commando technique employed when it is necessary that an enemy sentry shall die before he can make any sound whatever.

The murderer had been wearing cuffed cleaning gloves and had used the open copy of the *Times* to try to protect his clothes. But the cuff of the right-hand glove became bloodstained nevertheless. He shook the glove into the waste-paper basket. Then, with a quick intake of breath, he noticed a bloodstain on his overcoat too—close to the second button.

The stain was slight, but recognizable, and had obviously been made by contact with the cuff. He glanced round the room, picked up a copy of a magazine, leaving the *Times* on Ernest Fanshaw's desk. With his gloved left hand he then unlocked the door that gave on to the outside corridor. He shut and locked the door behind him. He folded the key in the left-hand glove and put it in a side pocket of his overcoat. The magazine, carried in a

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sufficiently natural manner, concealed the bloodstain near the second button.

It was now eight minutes past eleven.

Like any other murderer he had to escape from the scene of the crime before the police arrived. He achieved this purpose when he entered the taxi that was waiting for him.

"Back to where you picked me up—you remember?—just round the corner."

But like no other murderer he wished to draw attention to his movements—for the next few minutes only. The taxi itself would be useful. No ordinary businessman would take a taxi for so short a distance, and keep it waiting to boot.

The taximan stopped outside the building containing Julian Fanshaw's office, where he had originally picked up his passenger. The meter registered two shillings. The taximan was handed a ten-shilling note.

"Keep the change."

The taximan would remember. But some taximen were very clever at keeping out of the witness box. Luck produced a squad of window cleaners about to enter the building.

"Are you the foreman? My name is Fanshaw—you'll see it on the doors upstairs. I want you to do my windows last."

The foreman was given a pound note. Twenty shillings, where five would have been adequate. The foreman would remember.

And there was more luck coming. On the staircase he met a man coming down. The latter happened to be Marberry, whose office was on the third floor, a personal acquaintance of Julian Fanshaw's.

"Hullo, Fanshaw! Looks as if you were right about Pretty Polly!"

"Hope so. I'm backing her to win."

Marberry blinked as the other passed on. "Pretty Polly" was not a racehorse, but their own nickname for Pritt-Polson, owner of the building, whom they had been pressing for improvements.

Now the luck was petering out. In the hall below there was a mild commotion. The window cleaner's voice and then Marberry's, explaining—obviously to the police. He caught the words "Pretty Polly." The taxi driver was chipping in, too.

He had not expected the police here for at least another twenty minutes. He would have to hurry.

The fatal slip, of tradition, is often the result of an unconscious habit, a foible, an affectation which leads to identification and eventually to the gallows. The same principle operates, of course, in reverse—sometimes shielding the guilty, sometimes saving the innocent from arrest.

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Julian might well have had no substantial alibi but for an odd little trick of carrying in his pockets unstamped postcards, on which he would make notes—both business and personal.

On the day of the murder he had arrived at his office half an hour earlier than usual. A client, who had bought a furniture business in bankruptcy, required two thousand items of furniture to be transported from Plymouth to London within seven months, and was clamoring for an estimate on slow delivery.

"This Baverbridge estimate will keep us on the hop," Julian said, when he and Miss Hackett had hurried through the morning mail. "I made some notes at home last night—and some more in the train, with some queries for you." He flicked out half a dozen postcards, held them fanwise like a poker hand, then put them back in his pocket. "Now where the devil did I put those notes—?"

"In your overcoat pocket, I expect. Shall I look?"

"Please."

Julian's room was of the seedy type often affected by prosperous businessmen to convey that overhead costs are cut to a minimum for the benefit of the customer. The steely gray overcoat and wide-brimmed homburg hung inelegantly on the wall between an early-model rolltop desk and a gaunt metal closet some six feet high, deemed to be fireproof. The walls were quite clean, but the carpet was nearly threadbare and one of the floorboards creaked.

Miss Hackett felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat and produced another poker hand of postcards.

"That's it. You might pencil in the answers, in case I get an idea when I'm not in the office. I'll be in the chart room if anything really urgent crops up."

The chart room was the powerhouse of the firm. It was lined with wall maps, several of which Julian now removed to the long table. There were special filing cabinets for the charts, a couple of fireproof cupboards, and a single chair. Considered as a room, it was the best in the suite, with an inner and outer door, whereas Julian's room was a mere annex of Miss Hackett's, with no outer door.

Thus Julian went through Miss Hackett's room, across the interior corridor containing a peephole window labeled *Inquiries,* through the typists' room to the chart room. He always went that way to the chart room and always made the return journey through the outer door of the chart room and the outer corridor, thereby completing a loop when he reached the interior corridor—another little idiosyncrasy which Miss Hackett had noted with aunt-like indulgence.

In half an hour—that is, by ele-

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ven o'clock—Miss Hackett had looked up the references and filled in the blanks and queries on the overcoat postcards. She took the cards into Julian's room and put them on his desk. Then, reminding herself that he would probably drop something on top of them and leave the office without them, she picked up the cards again and put them back in the breast pocket of his overcoat. The telephone rang as she returned to her own room.

"Good morning, Miss Hackett, Mr. Thwaites speaking for Mr. Ernest Fanshaw. Is Mr. Julian in the office, please?"

"Yes, Mr. Thwaites. He's in the chart room. I can't switch you through, as there's no extension. If you'll wait a minute—"

"Don't disturb him, please. My chief only wishes to know if he is there. I think he will call on Mr. Julian later in the morning. Thank you, Miss Hackett."

At eleven ten a junior typist brought Miss Hackett a glass of milk which she took in obedience to her doctor, disliking it. She started on a letter. One paragraph, one gulp. As she finished the milk she was again interrupted.

"Everything o-kay, Miss Hackett?"

It was a meaningless question. Julian, she told herself, was getting flustered over this Baverbridge estimate.

"I've been over your notes and I've put the cards back in your overcoat pocket." Then she added, "Your uncle is coming to see you some time today."

"We're too busy. Ring him back, but be diplomatic. Say I'll look in on him on my way up tomorrow."

He passed on to his own room, shutting the door behind him. Miss Hackett dialed Ernest Fanshaw, but the number was busy. She was halfway through the next letter when she heard steps in the reception corridor which did not stop at *Inquiries*. Her door was opened by a man in early middle-age and of benign appearance.

"I am Detective Inspector Thurtle. May I speak to Mr. Fanshaw, please?"

"I'll tell him you're here." Miss Hackett went into Julian's room, closely followed by Thurtle. The room was empty.

"Did you expect Mr. Fanshaw to be in this room, Miss Hackett?"

"Yes. He came here from the chart room a few minutes ago. He spoke to me, then went into his room. He must have gone back to the chart room while I was on the telephone and I didn't notice. Will you follow me, please."

She took him through the typists' room. When she opened the inner door of the chart room Julian did not look up. He was seated sideways at the long table, a writing pad on his knee since

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there was no room for it on the table, which was covered with maps now opened out and fluttering in the draft.

"I believe we can do the whole job by—hullo, Inspector."

"Good morning, Mr. Fanshaw."

Miss Hackett retired, shutting the door behind her. Julian tore a sheet from the writing pad, clipped it to similar sheets of notes.

"Take this chair, Inspector," he invited, rising.

Thurtle did not move. He was gazing at the other with something approaching awe. He meant to be curt and official, but he actually spoke like a human being.

"*Why* didn't you take my warning? It was madness to go through with it."

"Last time we met, Inspector," said Julian, with controlled exasperation, "you told me you believed that I had faked my own 'double.' And you warned me not to murder my uncle. Are you now telling me that my uncle *has* been murdered—and that I have murdered him?"

"If you want to play it that way—yes, to both questions."

"Well, I'm damned! Poor old Uncle Ernest! As you don't believe the double exists you've come to arrest me?"

"Unless you can account for your movements between eleven o'clock this morning and the present moment—and answer my questions satisfactorily."

"I turned up here about nine thirty and I haven't left the office. Doesn't leave much scope for questions, does it?"

Thurtle shrugged. His familiar task had suddenly become distasteful.

"To save a lot of cross-talk I'll tell you what you're up against." Thurtle told him about the taxi, about Thwaites, about the latter telephoning Miss Hackett—about the window cleaners' foreman and the encounter with Marberry.

"Marberry spoke to you. And you gave him a funny answer about 'Pretty Polly'—a clever touch that, to clinch the 'double' idea. And you gave it more and more buildup by leaving a trail through the taximan and the window cleaners—to suggest that if you were the murderer you wouldn't be such a fool as to leave a trail of your movements at the most dangerous time."

"Of course I wouldn't!" laughed Julian. "How does it go on?"

"The man who got out of that taxi and came into this building is still in this building—and he can't get out."

"Meaning me?" Julian offered his wrists, as if for handcuffs. "What are you waiting for?"

"All right, if you want to drag it out! How long had you been sitting in that chair when Miss Hackett brought me in here?"

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"I haven't left this room since I entered it about ten thirty."

"Miss Hackett says you were talking to her in her room a few minutes before I turned up."

"I was not!" cried Julian. "But if Miss Hackett said it, she *believed* it to be true. Did she say that I then left her and went back to this room?"

"She said you went into that inner room off hers—she thought you were still there."

"And she went into that inner room?"

"Of course she did! So did I. It was empty."

"Did you look in the fireproof closet? It's big enough to hold a man."

Thurtle turned sharply to the door, then checked himself.

"There was no man in that closet, Fanshaw. You're trying to suggest it was the 'double' who spoke to Miss Hackett?"

"What for? In the hope of convincing you?"

"You're not bothering about me—you're setting the stage for the jury." When Julian made no answer, Thurtle went on, "We can't search this building properly until the office workers have left. So you can go on stalling until about seven this evening."

Thurtle left the chart room by the outer door, waited in the corridor until Sergeant Boyce reported.

"Four floors and a basement. Total of six offices. We've been through them all, everybody cooperating. The basement gives on to a blind wall approached through the caretaker's living quarters. So the only way out is by the front. Window cleaners will be here most of the day. I've asked 'em to keep their eyes open."

News of the murder had by now reached Julian's staff. Thurtle found it necessary to console Miss Hackett—whereupon she recovered her office manner and proved herself an ideal witness. Like many of her kind she was time-conscious. She explained that the routine had been slightly affected by the Baverbridge estimate.

"It was close to half-past ten when Mr. Fanshaw went to the chart room. By eleven I had finished working on his notes. I made the entries on his postcards"—Miss Hackett smiled on the word—"then took them into his room. Then Mr. Thwaites rang—that would be a minute or so after eleven—asking if Mr. Julian were in the office. Next, the junior brought me my glass of milk—it ought to have been brought at eleven punctually, but it was nearer ten past. I had just finished the milk when Mr. Fanshaw came in from the chart room and spoke to me and then went into his room."

Thurtle decided not to raise the issue of the "double."

"And what time was that?"

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"It would have been—twelve to fifteen minutes past eleven."

Near enough to the time when Mayberry and the foreman of the window cleaners were giving their information to Boyce and himself, noted Thurtle.

"Check this, please, Miss Hackett. Between ten thirty and eleven fifteen you do not know for certain that Mr. Fanshaw was in the chart room—the whole of that time? You only *infer* that he must have been there?"

"If you wish to split hairs it's possible that he *might* have gone up to see Mr. Marberry for a few minutes—they're putting pressure on the landlord—but it's extremely unlikely, as we are working against time. Anyhow, I know he didn't leave the building—"

"How do you know that?"

"Because he never goes out without his overcoat after the first of October"—again the indulgent smile—"and his overcoat was hanging up, as it is at this moment."

She got up and opened the communicating door. Thurtle followed her and contemplated the steely gray overcoat surmounted by the broad-brimmed homburg.

"He always hangs it there, Miss Hackett? But you don't notice it *every* time you come into the room?"

"I do not," agreed Miss Hackett. "But on this occasion I did—I had to." She told him how she had first put the postcards on the desk. "Then I thought they would be safer in his pocket. So I put them there." She thrust her hand into the breast pocket of the overcoat. "And here they are."

That was conclusive. Thwaites had stated that the murderer was wearing a gray overcoat and wide-brimmed homburg. And the taxi-man, Marberry, and the foreman of the window cleaners had said the same.

For the first time in his official life Thurtle caught himself trying to shirk a fact because it menaced a theory. It would be absurd to believe that Miss Hackett was lying—making herself an accessory. And Miss Hackett was proving that Julian Fanshaw could not have been the murderer seen by Thwaites and the others—in short, that the "double" did exist, and the "double" had killed Ernest Fanshaw.

There was still one loophole—the possibility that Fanshaw was using a duplicate coat and hat. In which case he must have hidden the duplicates in the building.

Thurtle was staring at the postcards which Miss Hackett had handed him. As the sense of shock weakened he studied the notes on the postcards, then returned them to Miss Hackett, who put them back in the pocket of the overcoat.

Before leaving the room Thurtle lifted the coat from its peg, looked

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it over, back and front, and replaced it. He did the same with the homburg, studying the inside, noting that there was no mark of ownership on the inner band. Next, his eye rested on a metal closet near the window.

"What do you keep in there?"

"Any special documents to be protected from fire, but it's been out of use for the last three months. If you want to look inside I'll have to ask Mr. Fanshaw for the key—oh!—it's not locked—it's not even properly shut!"

She opened the door, revealing an empty interior. If the "double" existed, that closet would have been large enough to hide him. And so would the similar closets in the chart room.

While explaining Julian's routine and recent movements Miss Hackett had made use of the diary.

"I see, Miss Hackett, that Mr. Fanshaw went to Manchester on the fifth and stayed overnight. To meet a client, I suppose?"

"I don't know if it was a definite client. He may have gone with the general idea of seeking new business. He gave me no details."

Thurtle thanked Miss Hackett, then went back to the chart room—in search of a duplicate coat and hat.

"I'd like to have a look round, Mr. Fanshaw, especially in those closets."

"Go ahead," said Julian, without looking up. "Nothing is locked."

The first was little more than nests of deep metal drawers, of which three were empty and two contained account books. The second closet was grooved for shelves, but all the shelves had been taken out. It could have concealed an overcoat—or a man, for that matter—but it was empty. The drawers of the filing cabinet were too small even for the hat—as were the drawers in the long table.

Downstairs, Thurtle found Sergeant Boyce in the hall. Two men were guarding the doors. Thurtle spoke to Boyce.

"Gray overcoat and broad-brimmed homburg. See that they don't leave the building on anybody or are carried away by anybody. Examine all outgoing bags and parcels big enough to contain either or both."

Thurtle left the building and walked round the corner to the late Ernest Fanshaw's office, where he received a detailed report from Rouse, the Inspector in charge.

He was shown the copy of the *Times* which had been brought in by the murderer and used in the murder. Rouse turned to the page—unstained—which is allotted to small advertisements. Near the center of one column about two inches had been somewhat clumsily cut out.

"Thought you'd like to have a

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look at this, sir—I've never seen a cluer clue, myself!" chuckled Rouse. "Jagged edge and all—so when we find the missing bit we can fit it in and know we've found *the* missing bit."

"That sort of thing does happen sometimes." Thurtle grinned. "What's the missing bit about?"

"Just what you'd expect, when you come to think of it." Rouse produced a complete copy of the same edition and read aloud: "'Legacies. Reversions. Missing relatives. Genealogies traced. Identification formalities executed. Write for appointment. Guardian Agency, 15, Tinbury, E.C. 2.' I've phoned the agency that we want a list of those answering this ad as soon as possible."

"Anything else?"

"Not a thing. The glove—you can buy 'em in any of the chain stores. The commando knife—thousands of 'em have been smuggled out of the Army as souvenirs. Tidiest job on record, I'd say."

In the early afternoon Inspector Thurtle returned to Julian Fanshaw's office. The guard in the hall reported all quiet. Julian Fanshaw had lunched in the office. On the landing Thurtle came upon Sergeant Boyce talking to a junior typist who had been in charge of the office while the staff was out at lunch.

Thurtle learned from the girl that she had taken the lunch tray to Mr. Fanshaw in the chart room. She had seen him again when he came through the typists' room, on the way to his own room. He had been carrying a metal drawer, apparently full of papers. It was a big drawer and she had opened the doors for him. There was no further information, except that the window cleaners had been at work most of the time.

In the office Miss Hackett reported that Mrs. Fanshaw had come, following a telephone message, and was now with her husband in the chart room.

Thurtle, interviewing Elsa in Julian's room, was favorably impressed by the frankness of her answers about their home life.

"So your routine went on very much as usual these last three months?" When Elsa agreed he asked, "Was your husband absent from home on the night of the fifth of this month?"

The rather beautiful mouth was distorted in a sudden twitch. The answer was a long time coming.

"*Yes.*" It was a strained whisper, as if a damaging admission had been dragged from her. "But there's no reason why I should make a fuss about it—to a police officer." She took a grip of herself. "To the best of my belief my husband spent that night at Manchester. On the other hand, some neighbors of ours—Mr. and Mrs. Brigstock—will tell you that

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they saw him dining with me at Blainley's Restaurant that night. For all I know, the Brigstocks—or somebody else—may have seen us going home in the car at about one in the morning. I tell you—I suppose I'd better keep saying 'to the best of my belief'—I tell you that it was *not* my husband! It was this murderer who took me out—and came home with me."

Thurtle was thunderstruck.

"Mrs. Fanshaw! A man spent all that time with you! And you failed to perceive that he was not your husband—until the following morning!"

She flushed, but she still gave the impression that she was telling the truth.

"You think a woman couldn't possibly make a mistake like that? I thought so, too—in a way, I still think so. I know that sounds like nonsense—oh, please try to look at it from my point of view, Inspector! Julian—that is, the other man—came home in the middle of the afternoon. He said that the trip had been canceled."

"One minute! With all this double stuff you'd been hearing about, weren't you suspicious?"

"Of course I was! I actually said 'How do I know you *are* Julian?' I forget how he answered—I forgot even that I had asked him. We had a jolly evening in Town."

Thurtle was convinced that she believed her own tale. He beamed like an uncle and encouraged her to give a detailed account of the evening, up to the return home. She added that she had telephoned Miss Hackett at two the following afternoon.

"And when your husband came home that evening he told you he had spent the previous night at Manchester?"

"No, he didn't. He referred to 'our' evening in Town. But I could tell he was pretending. He had met Brigstock on the train, and Brigstock had mentioned that he had seen 'us' at Blainley's. Julian guessed what had happened and wanted to save my face."

That was a nuisance, reflected Thurtle; if Julian had stuck to the Manchester story it would have been easy to check.

"Let's get this clear, Mrs. Fanshaw. You had a suspicion the moment he turned up on Tuesday afternoon. He talked you out of that. But you must have become suspicious a second time or you wouldn't have rung Miss Hackett."

"Quite true. At breakfast next morning I panicked. I challenged him with a question which only my husband could answer. He was evasive. And when I pressed him for an answer, he was deeply offended and walked out of the house."

"What started the panic?"

"His overcoat, Inspector. When

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I came downstairs, his coat was in the hall. The sun was on it. And I thought it seemed very slightly different—like the coat I saw on the 'double' at Blainley's—though, even then, I wasn't sure." Her eyes turned to the coat hanging on the peg, beneath the homburg. "If you'll look closely at my husband's coat you'll see that the fabric—"

She stopped short, staring at the coat on the wall, her eyes wide with fear. "It was *that* coat!" The words came in a whisper. "That is the murderer's coat!"

"No need for alarm, Mrs. Fanshaw. I think you're mistaken, but we'll soon make sure. Don't touch it, please." Keeping one eye on Elsa he opened the communicating door.

"Miss Hackett! Will you kindly ask Mr. Fanshaw to come here—and please come back with him yourself. And I'd be very grateful if you'd send someone to get Sergeant Boyce."

Elsa was sitting at the desk. She was leaning back in the swivel chair, her eyes closed. Thurtle thought she might have fainted, and he touched her wrist. She opened her eyes as Julian came in. They waited in silence until Miss Hackett arrived, with Boyce.

Thurtle turned to Julian.

"Mr. Fanshaw. This morning Miss Hackett made some notes for you on postcards. May I see the notated postcards, please?"

"Certainly." He moved toward the desk.

"I put them in the breast pocket of your overcoat," said Miss Hackett, annoyed because he had apparently forgotten.

"Then they'll still be there." Julian felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat. As he withdrew his hand, empty, he touched the cloth, fingered it, then peered at it.

"This is not my overcoat!"

"Right! Stand away from it, please."

The left side pocket bulged. Thurtle drew out a cleaning glove with a long cuff—fellow to the bloodstained glove found in the wastebasket in Ernest Fanshaw's office. From the folds of the glove a key fell to the floor. Thurtle picked it up with his handkerchief.

"Evidence, Inspector?" asked Julian.

"That's a left-hand glove. A right-hand glove, similar in every way, was found in your uncle's office, bloodstained."

Thurtle lifted the coat from its peg, turned it, revealing the bloodstain near the second button.

"Better look at the hat, too, Mr. Fanshaw."

"Not mine! This one has initials on the inside band. *J.F.*—standing presumably for 'Julian Fanshaw.' I had no initials in my hat."

Thurtle remembered that the hat he himself had taken from

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that peg had no initials. And that the overcoat had nothing in the side pockets, and no bloodstain.

"That's the murder coat, all right!" put in Boyce.

"Maybe. But there's a catch in it," said Thurtle. "It's not the coat and hat I examined in this room—hanging on that peg—in Miss Hackett's presence this morning."

"A catch in it!" Julian laughed. "You'll find the same catch in all your evidence, Inspector, until you admit you've made a fool of yourself in accusing me of faking my own double. To everyone else it will be obvious that he walked in here—as me—and planted that coat."

"It's horrible!" cried Elsa. "Things are creeping up behind us and strangling us. Julian, I told Inspector Thurtle that you were in Manchester that night and that the other man was with me."

"That just about puts the lid on!" Julian dropped into a chair, straddle-wise. "Inspector, my wife has been torturing herself with this nightmare until she has come to believe it. I was *not* in Manchester—I was with her."

"Miss Hackett!" boomed Thurtle over Elsa's protest. "Can you contribute anything?"

"I can only say that Mr. Fanshaw left the office with a suitcase at about two thirty on the Tuesday afternoon and that he returned with the suitcase at about three on Wednesday."

"That doesn't prove that I went to Manchester. I changed my mind after leaving the office and put my suitcase in a cloakroom. I did so precisely because I was afraid my double might turn up and make love to Elsa."

Thurtle glanced at Elsa and received the impression that she believed Julian.

"And where did you happen to be, Mr. Fanshaw, between breakfast time and three o'clock on Wednesday?"

"Walking the streets of London in a state of advanced nervous depression, due to my wife's inability to tell me from another man—and in a general blue funk about this whole twin-brother-double business. Ask me if I met anybody. I didn't. I can't prove any of it. And I don't have to!"

To Elsa his outburst registered as a cry for help.

"I can help you prove you were with me—if you were, Julian. I told the Inspector everything we did. You've only to repeat it."

"I don't see how that will help," muttered Julian. "But here goes. We dined at Blainley's. Brigstock and his wife saw us."

"And after Blainley's, Julian?" Her eagerness revealed that she had changed ground and was ready to believe Julian had been with her in spite of everything, including the coat in the hall.

"After Blainley's we went to a

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show, but I can't remember which. Nothing sticks out in particular—there was the usual scramble to get out before the curtain calls, to make sure of the last train."

The last train! There came a low moan from Elsa. Julian did not even know that they had gone from the theater to a night club—and then on home in the car, long after the last train.

Without a word to anyone she walked out of the room, out of the suite. Julian abandoned a half-hearted attempt to follow her. He ignored the others, absorbed in his own thoughts.

"If you don't want me for anything else, Inspector, I'll get back to the chart room," he said absently. "All these upsets are putting me behind in my work."

At five the various staffs began to leave. By half-past six Julian—still in the chart room wrestling with estimates—was the only office worker left in the building. Thurtle came in without knocking.

"We shan't be very long now," he announced. "There aren't many spots in this building where a man can hide himself."

"I don't think you'll find him," said Julian indifferently. "He probably planted that coat in my room during lunch hour."

Thurtle found himself staring at the long table, still cluttered with wall maps, as it had been when he first saw it. Why should a man want to take a lot of maps from the wall and jumble them all up on the table?

"During lunch hour—yes," said Thurtle. "But you planted the coat yourself. When you came into this room this morning from your uncle's office you hid that coat and hat under those maps there on the table. During lunch hour you carried the coat and hat into the other room in one of those big metal drawers, covering the top with papers to prevent the girl seeing anything."

"You're letting this become an obsession, Thurtle. I thought you'd drop it after our little get-together with my wife—and the coat and the bloodstain and whatnot."

"*And* the visit to Manchester," said Thurtle. "Were you in Manchester that night?"

"No."

"Exactly! You tell us—truthfully—you were not in Manchester, because you know we could check. You tell your wife you were not in Manchester in such a way as to make her certain that you're lying. You worked up suspicion at home by dodging her test question. And this afternoon you *deliberately* fluffed—by leaving out that you went on to the Mignon night club and that you went home in your own car. Result she's ready to swear that she was in the company of the double!"

Julian stared at Thurtle. "Is

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short, everything I say and do is a fake—even if there's no evidence of a fake. You see what I mean by obsession? My dear fellow, talk it over with your sergeant! He'll tell you that the expert searching of this building is sheer footle. He'll tell you that my double planted the coat, removed mine, and then walked out of the building more or less disguised as a window cleaner."

Thurtle looked blank. He had forgotten those window cleaners.

Julian went on, "I don't suppose your men looked very closely at the window cleaners. Under your obsessional orders they were concentrating on me."

Obsession! Thurtle admitted to himself that the word made him wince. He had certainly formed a theory early in the case—not that you could ever really string facts together without making a theory of some sort!

"If he got himself up as a window cleaner, what did he do with the coat and hat he took off your peg?"

"Obviously he hid them. You'll almost certainly find them somewhere in this office. Now I come to think of it there's a loose floorboard in my room—parallel with my desk and close to the back. It's been like that for years."

Some five minutes later Julian was invited into his own room. Thurtle and Boyce stood by while one of the searchers raised the loose floorboard.

"What do you see, Mr. Fanshaw?"

"My overcoat and hat, by the look of it."

Thurtle bent down. There was a clearance of only about three inches between the floorboards and the reinforced concrete. The overcoat had been spread under the adjoining boards and the hat had been flattened. Thurtle coaxed the coat free and held it up.

"Is that your coat?"

"It appears to be. Try the pocket for those cards Miss Hackett put there."

Thurtle withdrew the cards and recognized them from his previous inspection. He laid the coat on a chair and retrieved the hat.

"I'm glad I was right!" chirped Julian.

Boyce and the searchers left the room.

"May I have my hat and coat—they aren't evidence of anything, are they?"

Thurtle felt in the other pockets, which were empty, then handed over the coat. Julian took a clothes brush from a drawer and used it. Then he put on the coat and the hat.

"If I can't be of any further use to you, Inspector, I think I'll go home."

"I can't stop you."

"I gather the murderer has got clean away?"

Their eyes met. Thurtle could

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only see a man of iron nerve, stimulated by bravado—a man enjoying his own peril.

"Maybe he thinks he got clean away!"

"I have to remember that he will probably turn out to be my twin brother. All the same, I hope you catch him. But even if you don't it won't prove that he doesn't exist. I mean—how *can* you prove that a man does *not* exist? Think it over, Inspector. Good night!"

The police obtained an adjournment of the inquest after formal evidence had been given. Two days after the funeral Julian Fanshaw, as beneficiary under the reversion with an approximate value of £50,000, filed proof of his uncle's death. The Guardian Agency had received 34 answers to its advertisement in the *Times* and the police had checked the list without result.

"Looks like a dead case, Thurtle," said the Assistant Commissioner—by which he meant that they had already obtained all the evidence that was obtainable. "This twin business! I confess I'm keeping an open mind. Like you, of course, I always disbelieve those yarns about identical twins. But some of the yarns are true. Anyhow, we'll send the papers in and see what happens."

The Director of Public Prosecutions sent the papers back—but he sent with them one of the brighter members of his staff, a man named Mawson, to soften the blow.

"We can't charge Fanshaw as a principal, because we can't prove that the twin—or double—has no existence. Equally, he could not be charged as accessory, principal unknown, because there is no evidence that the two men ever met or communicated with each other."

"Are you breaking it gently to us," asked the Assistant Commissioner, "that Fanshaw is going to get away with the murder?"

"That's my opinion—I'm not quoting anybody, mind! The strength of Fanshaw's position lies in the evidence his wife will give—that she let the other man spend the evening with her, believing him to be her husband."

"But Fanshaw himself denies it," objected Thurtle.

"Fanshaw denies it to you because you would check and prove he was not in Manchester. But at the trial Fanshaw would obviously exercise his right to *keep out of the witness box*. His wife's evidence would therefore stand. Without some rebutting evidence—which you cannot produce—her evidence would establish the existence of the—call him the Twin. That, in turn, would strengthen the already strong alibi given by Miss Hackett."

Mawson bowed himself out,

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leaving the two officials in the dumps.

"The funny thing about these office lawyers, sir, is that after a few years of it they know a lot about the law and nothing about anything else, if you understand."

"Got an idea, Thurtle?"

"You could hardly call it an idea, sir. I'm pretty sure the wife is playing straight—doesn't know she's being used. And I don't think she'll be very pleased when I tell her so."

He went down to Rubington after lunch, trying to work out a tactful approach. It was a distasteful job. He thought of Elsa as a featherhead, but a good woman at heart who deserved a better man.

In the front yard of the Fanshaws' house was a real estate agent's notice advertising a sale by auction.

"Mr. Thurtle!" She greeted him almost as an old friend. "Have you some good news?"

"Nothing much. I've come down on the chance of picking up something from you." He declined an offer of coffee and said it was too early for tea. "I see you're moving?"

"It's awful here," she admitted. "People don't exactly cut us outright. But they simply don't believe in the twin."

"You can't blame them," he said sympathetically. "You didn't altogether believe in him yourself after that first encounter at Blainley's. Did you?"

"I suppose I didn't, really. It's sort of too much to believe suddenly, isn't it?"

"But by the time of the Manchester incident you believed absolutely in a twin, didn't you?"

"Y-yes, I had to. But it was all loose ends. I didn't say 'because this, therefore that'—the way you do. I had proved to my own satisfaction that it was not Julian who took me out that night. A couple of days later I sort of stood a long way off and looked at the whole thing. It seemed then that I couldn't possibly have mistaken another man for Julian. I believed one thing—then I believed the opposite—then back again. It was muddled and silly, but that was how I felt. And I don't mind telling you now that I thought the police were cheating."

"Well, I'm jiggered! How did we manage to cheat?"

"I thought that you weren't really trying to find the twin because, like the local Superintendent, you didn't really believe in him. So after a day or two I went to a private detective."

"And he charged you a lot and told you nothing?"

"That's spiteful, Inspector," she smiled. "He only charged me three guineas and he refused to go on with the case after he had been to the hospital to inquire—where they made him believe that a mis-

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take would have been impossible."

That gave Thurtle an inspiration—the first one he had in the entire case.

"Don't mind my feelings," he said. "You were disappointed with us. And then you went to one of those agencies that offer to trace missing relatives?"

"How did you know?"

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that your policemen are wonderful? I can even give you the name. The Guardian Agency, in Tinbury."

"I think that was the name. Only, you see, I didn't go. Nothing came of it because, before I had mailed the letter, Miss Hackett rang up telling me about Uncle Ernest. I knew then that you'd *have* to try and find him."

"I'd like to know what you said to the agency. It might give me a new angle."

"I didn't say much—the advertisement said to write for an appointment. Now that I think of it I don't remember tearing up the letter."

She went to an escritoire. Thurtle held his breath while she opened a drawer and rummaged around. Then she looked under the blotter.

"Here it is. It's sealed but not stamped—I remember I didn't have a stamp."

She handed him the envelope. He took out the letter.

Dear Sir: In answer to the enclosed advertisement in today's Times—

Pinned to the notepaper was the advertisement, clumsily cut, with a jagged edge.

"Are you sure you cut it from the *Times*, as you say in the letter?"

"It's delivered here every morning. I cut it out before Julian took it to the office."

Thurtle's sense of triumph was dampened by pity. There was still a nasty little bit of work to be done.

"I'm glad you happened to show me this, Mrs. Fanshaw." He took out his fountain pen. "It's evidence, among other things, that you believed in the twin and were trying to help the police to find him. I'd like to show it to my chief. Just sign your name on the advertisement, will you—write it so that your signature runs over onto the notepaper."

When she had signed he gently waved the paper to dry the ink—reflecting that there was no longer any means by which he could soften the blow that must come to her. He chattered himself out of the house.

On arriving at the Yard the Inspector was startled to learn that Mr. Fanshaw had asked to see him and was in the waiting room. Ten minutes later—after Thurtle had checked the advertisement with the copy from which it had been cut—Julian was shown in.

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"Good afternoon, Inspector." Julian's face was flushed and the heartiness was self-conscious. "My wife rang me up to say you had seen her and that you were rather enthusiastic over a clipping from a newspaper. Can I be of any help?"

"You can," said Thurtle. "On the day your uncle was murdered you left home carrying a copy of that day's *Times*. *Did you give that copy to your twin brother before eleven o'clock—so that he could use it while committing the murder?*"

Julian sighed. For a long moment he looked haggard, then he bucked back into heartiness.

"I guessed what had happened when she told me you'd made her sign the clipping. Odd thing, Inspector, I suddenly became terrified of Miss Hackett—thought I'd sneak round here and get it over with quietly. I'll sign a confession. But you've won on a fluke, you know."

"Fluke be damned!" cried Thurtle. "If you hadn't dragged your wife in as an unconscious accomplice—upset the poor girl's nerves by making her think you were in Manchester that night—she'd never have cut out that advertisement!"

NEXT MONTH . . .

11 ***NEW*** **short stories — including**

MICHAEL GILBERT's *The Cork in the Bottle*

JACOB HAY's *That Was the Day That Was*

H. R. F. KEATING's *Inspector Ghote and the Test Match*

JAMES POWELL's *Kleber on Murder in 30 Volumes*

RICHARD MATHESON's *Needle in the Heart*

3 First Prize Winners —

STANLEY ELLIN's *The Moment of Decision*

A. H. Z. CARR's *The Black Kitten*

AVRAM DAVIDSON's *The Necessity of His Condition*

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

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A regional murder mystery, with a most unusual detective—a man who came back to his hometown after spending four years in a mental institution. But the man who came back had a deep personal interest in Sutler's Knob—he returned to find out what had happened to his Paw that terrible day a year before . . .

THAT DAY ON THE KNOB

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

"THIS HERE'S CANNON GAP, Mister." The bus driver opened the door with a hiss of escaping air, and the man stepped out onto the sidewalk. The door closed behind him, and the man waited while the bus pulled away from the curb in front of the dry goods store. Clouds of dust containing gum wrappers, empty chewing tobacco packages, and other light debris were sucked into the air from the gutter by the vehicle's passing. Then the bus seemed to be swallowed up by the trees which crowded close to the road at the village outskirts.

It was hot. The man pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his brow. His clothes—the ones he'd been given when he'd been released from the "hospital"—were beginning to make his skin itch.

The place hadn't changed much in four years, he thought. Oh, the gas station at the edge of town had new pumps, and according to the sign in a window above the grocery store a doctor had finally been talked into starting a practice here. But the sidewalks still had the same old cracks where the roots of trees had heaved up the cement, and the whole row of business buildings listed slightly to one side like trees in a high wind. And then there were the mountains. The mountains never changed. With their coats of trees—pines, mostly, with a scattering of hardwoods—they marched off into the smoky distance like sentinels guarding Cannon Gap from the outside world.

He looked across the street, above the false front of the coal and feed store to where Sutler's Knob reared upward, its domed back arched against the sky and its near side sloping down to a

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point a scant hundred feet behind the buildings of the town. A geologist would have identified The Knob as a drumlin left ages ago when the ice of the glacier receded, and a historian could have mentioned that it was given its name because a resourceful local innkeeper had supplied both Union and Rebel troops with white lightning distilled in a clearing on The Knob during the Civil War. The people of Cannon Gap neither knew these facts nor cared to know them. It was enough that the mound, "bigger than a hill and not big enough for a mountain," provided a grazing place for deer both in and out of the hunting season, and a man who had only enough money for a few bullets for his rifle could get enough meat in a couple of days to last him all winter.

And then there was that other thing—about a year ago, it was—the thing that happened that day on Sutler's Knob.

The man walked across the street and onto the sagging porch of the combination hardware store and post office. The door squeaked as he opened it, just as it had the last time he'd gone inside, four years ago.

The proprietor of the hardware store studied the man carefully. There weren't many men who traveled around town wearing a suit in the middle of the week. Especially strangers. Maybe the man was there to hunt. Maybe there'd be the sale of a rifle, or even—

"Aaron Twichell still the sheriff here?" asked the man. "Does he still have his office in the back like he used to?"

The proprietor's smile of welcome sagged. Anybody who knew that much about Cannon Gap couldn't be a stranger. "Say," he said, recognition dawning on his face, "ain't you—"

But the man had already edged his way past the display of push brooms and through the doorway at the rear of the store. The small room in which he found himself was dirty and stifling. On one wall, WANTED posters had been tacked to the bare wood, some of them yellowed and cracked with age. A small window let in a little light, but its coating of dust made it impossible to see through. A fly buzzed listlessly through the air and then lit on the sticky coil of paper hanging from the ceiling, where it tried vainly to free itself.

Next to the window was a battered desk, piled high with papers. At the opposite side of the desk, in a swivel chair, sat a grizzled old man, his back to the doorway, fanning himself with a day-old newspaper. He wore a workman's blue pants and shirt, but around his ample waist was buckled a wide belt from which hung

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a holster. The chunky handle of a revolver curved out of the holster's open top.

"Sheriff Twichell?"

The man behind the desk turned to face his visitor. "Yep, still here," he rumbled. "How are you, Gid?"

"I didn't think you'd remember me, Aaron. Not after all this time."

"I was the one who had to send you away, boy. It's only fit I should remember you when you returned."

"Have I changed much, Aaron?"

"That's a mite hard to say. My last memory of Gideon Granger was of him running naked as a jaybird through the streets of town, poking out windows with his bare fists and threatening to kill everybody he saw on the streets. You'd had spells before that, Gid, and I done my best to ignore 'em. But when you done that, I knew I'd have to send you to where a doctor could look after you. And now here you are, talking to me just as calm as anything."

Gideon nodded. "That was the night Maw died," he said slowly. "I don't remember too much about it. The doctor they brought in said she was dying, but I guess I didn't believe him."

"Did they treat you good where they sent you, boy?"

"Oh, fine, Aaron. Just fine. I don't remember too much about the first year, but after that it was real nice. Clean white sheets to sleep under and all the food you wanted."

"Yeah, you was a bit puny as a young 'un. Your ol' daddy's trap lines never did pay too well, did they?"

Gideon shook his head. "It was about Paw I came back," he said softly.

"I reckoned as much. I guess I knew when I sent you the letter about what happened that you'd be back to ask some questions personally."

"Will you tell me about it?"

Twichell rose ponderously from behind the desk and went to the door leading into the hardware store. "Cliff!" he called to the proprietor. "Go around to Purv Cooley, will you? He's probably over at the restaurant sparkin' that new waitress they've got. Tell him I want to see him in here."

The sheriff turned around to face Gideon. "Purvis Cooley's my deputy," he said. "The village gave him the job about three years ago. I guess they figured I wasn't as spry on my feet as I used to be. He's the one who actually went up on The Knob to fetch down your daddy, so he can probably answer most of your questions. By the way, you two went to school together, didn't you?"

"He was a year ahead of me," replied Gideon. "I knew him,

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though. But I didn't come back here to talk about people I used to know, Aaron."

"No, I suppose not."

"Want to tell me about Paw?"

"Sure." Twichell went back to his desk, sat down, and picked up a plug of tobacco from which he bit off a generous chew. "Like I wrote you in the letter, it all began when Lucy Hawkins was killed and her body was left in that stand of willows down by the crick. Cut up real bad, she was, like whoever done it was crazy in the head."

"So naturally everybody figured it was my Paw who did it," said Gideon dryly.

"Now don't get your dander up, boy. At first I didn't know who to suspect. After all, Lucy threw herself at every man in town, even if she was only sixteen. 'Course, all she did was tease, but I thought maybe she tried it with somebody who had a hair-trigger temper and wasn't in no mood for teasing. At a time like that it doesn't take much to make a man lose his head."

"When did you start thinking it might have been Paw who killed her?"

"I'll get to that. Anyway, next morning early, Tad Peckinpaugh came into the grocery store to get his supplies for the month. You remember Tad, don't you?"

"Remember him? He was the only person around these parts that Paw was really friendly with. So naturally everybody thought they was both crazy. Many's the time I spent the night in Tad's cabin up there on The Knob so's I could get an early start hunting. He was a good man, Aaron, even though people laughed at that harelip because it made him talk funny."

"Don't be so hard on the villagers, boy. In a small town like this, folks tend to make fun of what's different. You and your daddy had them spells when you acted odd, and Tad had his harelip. People laughed, but they didn't mean no harm."

"It's easy to say that when you ain't the one bein' laughed at," replied Gideon. "But go on with your story."

"While he was in the grocery store Tad talked some," said Twichell. "It was kind of hard to make out what he was sayin', but after a while I got it. Seems as though he'd come down from The Knob the night before and slept by the crick under the trees. As near as we could make out, he'd seen two people down there, late that night. One of 'em was Lucy Hawkins."

"Who was the other?"

"I got Tad over here to the office as soon as I realized what he was talkin' about and asked him that same thing. Questioned him for two solid hours, I did, but you know how queer Tad

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talked when he got excited. I couldn't understand a word he was saying. Finally I told him to go back to his place up on The Knob, and that I'd come up there and see him later in the day when he'd calmed down. That was the last time I saw Tad alive."

There was the sound of heavy footsteps coming through the hardware store, and then a man stood in the doorway of the little office. He was short and heavy-set, and he was dressed in a clean, sharply pressed brown uniform. His cap had a gleaming deputy sheriff's badge pinned to it, and his broad leather belt and holster shone with a high polish. "This here's Purv Cooley," said Twichell. "Purv, do you remember Gid Granger?"

"Sure I remember him," said Cooley with a broad smile. "When you left here, Gid, I was working over at the coal and feed. Just look at me now, huh?" And he hooked his thumbs authoritatively in his belt.

"I was just telling Gid about his daddy," Twichell went on. "I thought you might want to be in on the conversation."

"Yeah, that was more excitement than we've had around here in a long time," said Purvis. "That's how I got this." He fingered a thin white scar that ran from his right eyebrow up to his hairline.

"We'll get to that later, Purv," said Twichell. "But to go on, Gid, it wasn't no more than fifteen minutes after Tad Peckinpaugh had left my office to go to The Knob and back up to his cabin that your daddy came right to this here store and bought a box of .30-30 rifle cartridges."

"And that made him a murderer?"

"Nope. I'll admit I didn't like the idea of him goin' huntin' on that particular day, but he said he'd spotted a big deer up there on The Knob. Told us it had one antler busted off, and that's why the city hunters probably left it alone to grow so big. Anyway, he bought the cartridges and at least twenty people saw him go across out there and start climbing up The Knob."

"Go on, Aaron."

"About the time your daddy disappeared into the trees I got to thinking. Now he seemed in an awful hurry to get them cartridges. Maybe—just maybe, mind you—it wasn't deer he was huntin' for."

"What did you do then?"

"I was as nervous as a treed 'coon, and that's a fact. Even if he was hunting deer there was no telling what might happen if one of them spells came over him while he had a loaded gun in his hand. I talked it over with Purv here and we decided one of us better go up there and keep an eye on both your daddy and Tad. Purv said he'd go, him being a

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mite better able to get about in the brush. I was going to drive my pickup truck around that old logging road at the base of The Knob, just in case your daddy came down in a way other than the one he went up. Do you want to take the story from there, Purv?"

"Sure. Well, Gid, I was still crossing the clearing back there behind the stores and heading for The Knob when we all heard the shot."

"Shot? What shot?"

"The sound of a rifle. It came like a roll of thunder. Most everybody in town must have heard it. Those folks who'd seen your Paw leave figured there might be trouble."

"Trouble? Why?"

Remember, Tad Peckinpaugh was up there somewhere with a secret that somebody didn't want him to tell. And the sound came awful quick if your daddy was stalkin' a deer—it was only about ten minutes from the time he'd left the store."

"He could have surprised the deer in the brush, couldn't he?"

"Maybe, though it don't seem likely. Anyway, I began legging it up the side of The Knob toward where Tad Peckinpaugh had his cabin. I'd nearly reached it when I seen your Paw running through the trees like he was trying to get away from something."

"What did you do?"

"I called for him to stop, but either he didn't hear me or didn't pay me no mind. He just kept travelin' away from me. So I did what Sheriff Twichell always told me. I fired a couple of warning shots in the air and took off after him. When he saw I was catching up he threw away his rifle and surrendered meek enough."

"Then what?"

"We went back to Peckinpaugh's cabin. That's where we found the body."

"Tad's body?"

"Yep. He was lying under that apple tree he sometimes ties his hound to. There was a Bible near his body. He'd been shot smack through the heart, and the bullet went clear through the chest."

Gideon was silent for a long moment. "Go on," he said finally.

"Well, when he seen Tad lyin' there, your Paw had one of his spells. He threw hisself down on the ground and began quiverin' all over. The spit was runnin' from his mouth, and he kept banging his arms and legs against the earth. I was afraid he'd hurt himself, but finally he just passed out cold. I carried him down The Knob, and he was a load, believe me."

"I saw Purv carrying the old man as soon as he'd cleared the edge of the trees," said Twichell. "We put your daddy into the truck and brought him back."

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Then we locked him in that jail cell we rigged up in the barn back of the coal and feed store until he came to."

"Did you talk to Paw at all?"

"Yeah. Later, after he'd come to himself again."

"What did he have to say?"

"He denied having anything to do with Tad's death, of course. We told him we'd heard the shot, but he said he hadn't even seen Tad that morning."

"What about the shot?"

"He told us he'd jumped the deer he was looking for just a little way up The Knob. He fired at it, but it was a gut shot. The deer was bleeding bad, according to him, but it ran off into the trees. He was following it when he seen Purv, so he surrendered. That was his story."

"Did you believe it?"

"It was kind of hard to, Gid. After all, the whole village of Cannon Gap heard him fire his rifle, and there was no question but that Tad Peckinpaugh was killed by a rifle bullet. But after what happened that night it didn't make no never mind what I believed."

"Just what did happen that night, Aaron?"

"Well, you know what happens when a person dies. Other folks start makin' plaster saints out of 'em, instead of what they really was. Seems like by nightfall the villagers was saying Lucy Hawkins was just a sweet and innocent girl instead of a—you know. And Tad Peckinpaugh, to hear 'em say it, was a second cousin to John the Baptist, instead of just a funny old hermit.

"Anyway, they must have held a meeting somewhere. The first Purv and I knew about it they was coming down the street in a big mob. A few of 'em had rifles, and the man in front had a piece of rope he'd knotted into a noose. I ordered Purv back to the jail and then went out into the street myself to try and stop them. I fired my gun in the air, and they halted."

"What did you say to them?"

"I told them it wasn't right, takin' the law into their own hands. They just jeered and called me names. One of 'em said there was no sense lettin' them city lawyers get your daddy off, and that Cannon Gap could take care of its own problems. I was gettin' all set to answer when somebody must have snuck up behind me. Last thing I remember hearing was something whizzing through the air and clouting me alongside the head. Next I knew it was morning, and it was all over. Purv, have you got anything more to add?"

"Not much, Sheriff. I was down at the barn, outside the cell, when they come in. I didn't even have time to talk before one of 'em fetched me a blow with a rifle

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stock." He indicated the scar on his forehead.

"The next day," Twichell went on, "the cell was busted open, and your daddy was gone. Purv and me, we looked all over for him. Finally we found him. He was hanging by the neck from that same apple tree up on The Knob near where we'd found Tad Peckinpaugh's body."

Gideon Granger stared at Twichell, his face grim. "Who was leading the mob?" he asked. "Who was the man with the rope?"

"Now take it easy, boy," said Twichell, holding up his hand. "There weren't no real leader. They was all in it together."

"Then they all did wrong, didn't they, Aaron?"

"And you expect me to take some action, eh? What would you have me do, Gid? Destroy a whole town for something the law would have finally done anyway? Besides, those people are my friends."

"They're murderers, that's what they are, Aaron. And you're letting them get away with it. You should be ashamed of that badge you wear."

"I did the best I could, Gid."

"Did you ever send a report to the capital about what happened to my Paw?"

"Gid, be reasonable. What would be the sense of stirring up a hornet's nest and gettin' all them state fellers up here just to protect a—a—"

"A crazy old man, Aaron? My Paw was odd in some ways, but he wasn't crazy. And he never told a lie in his life."

"He denied killing Peckinpaugh."

"Just as you're denying to outsiders what happened to Paw."

"That's different, boy. How far do we have to go to protect a murderer?"

"That seems to depend on who the murderer is, doesn't it, Aaron? If it's an old man who has spells, not very far. But a mob of the town's 'best citizens'? That's different, isn't it?" He turned to go out of the office.

"What are you going to do, Gid?" asked Twichell quietly.

"I've got a few things to buy here at the hardware store."

"You ain't going to buy a gun, boy. I won't let Cliff sell you one."

"You come on out with me, Aaron. If you've got any objections to how I spend my money, just say so. I wouldn't want to do nothin' against the law." He spat out the last words contemptuously.

In the hardware store Gideon slapped down a small roll of bills that represented his meager earnings from working in the hospital during the last two years of his commitment. "I want a tent and some wool blankets," he said. "Also a lantern and an ax. I'll be back to pick them up. Right

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now I'm going over to the grocery for some food."

The word spread rapidly through Cannon Gap that Gideon Granger had returned. By the time he had made his purchases and rolled them into a large bundle tied with an old piece of clothesline, nearly every resident had turned out onto the main street. They watched in silence as he slung the makeshift pack over his shoulder and headed for the base of Sutler's Knob. "Crazy as a hoot owl," one of them murmured. "Just like his daddy was."

For three days Gideon lived on the sloping side of Sutler's Knob while the villagers waited in fearful silence to see what he was going to do. There was not a person who, during the course of his daily business, did not occasionally glance guiltily at The Knob, wondering what terrible vengeance was being prepared beneath the concealing limbs of the towering pine trees.

But late on the evening of the fourth day Gideon Granger returned to Cannon Gap. Few people saw him as he trudged toward Sheriff Twichell's office, but those who did see him noticed that he had a new burden. It was a soft gray, looking almost like the branch of a tree.

It was the antlers of a buck deer. And one fork of the antlers had been broken off close to the base.

Aaron Twichell was painfully writing out a report to be sent to the state capital when Gideon entered. There was a loud thump as the heavy rack of horns was flung onto the sheriff's desk. Gideon stood over the older man, his eyes glittering.

"Paw told you he'd gut-shot a deer with one busted antler," he said, "and nobody believed him. Well, I found the deer, Aaron, or at least its skeleton. It took me three days, but I knew it'd be there somewhere. Like I said, Paw never lied in his life."

"So you found a deer's skeleton, boy," said Twichell quietly. "What do you think that proves?"

"It proves Paw didn't kill Tad Peckinpaugh. You said you only heard the one shot up there on The Knob. And if he shot this deer Paw couldn't have—"

"Wait a minute," said Twichell quickly. "All you found was a skeleton. This here deer could have been shot some other time. Or maybe it just died of old age or maybe—"

"Aaron, I want you to listen to me for a while. Don't say a word—just listen."

"To what?"

"I think I know what really happened that day on Sutler's Knob."

Twichell leaned back wearily in his chair and closed his eyes. "Go ahead, Gid," he said.

By the time Gideon finished,

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Aaron Twichell was no longer leaning back in the chair. He was sitting bolt upright with his eyes wide-open. "An interesting idea, Gid," he said. "Maybe you can tell me how you're going to prove it."

"I think I can," said Gideon.

It was two o'clock in the morning when some of the inhabitants of Cannon Gap were awakened by a strange roaring sound which seemed to be coming from the direction of The Knob. It stopped and then began again, rising and falling like the growling of a gigantic demon. Most of those who heard it pulled their blankets over their heads, their hearts pounding with fear.

And it was nearly dawn when old Mrs. Dunlap, who lived next to the Baptist Church and had trouble sleeping because of her arthritis, saw the lights of Aaron Twichell's pickup truck go on across the street. The starter whirred, the motor caught, and as it roared out of the village she thought she saw two men sitting in the front seat.

The following afternoon, when Purvis Cooley reported for duty at the sheriff's office, he found Aaron Twichell asleep in his chair. On the floor, wrapped in a sleeping bag he'd got from the store out in front, lay Gideon Granger, snoring loudly.

"Come on in, Purv," said Twichell without opening his eyes. "Bring in a chair. One of them aluminum folding ones are as good as any."

Purvis brought in a chair for himself and another for Gideon. When the three men were seated, the deputy looked from Twichell to Gideon and back again.

"Shucks, Gid," he said finally. "You didn't have to lie in here at the office. You could have come over to my place if I'd known you was back. I thought you was still up on The Knob."

"Gid and me, we've been workin' all night," said Twichell. "We was a bit tired when we'd finished, so his staying here seemed as good a place as any."

"All night? I didn't think there was enough for us to do in this town to keep us busy all day," said Purvis. "What have you been doing?"

"Gid's got an idea about the killings last year—Lucy Hawkins and Tad Peckinpaugh—and it seems pretty good," said Twichell. "He don't think his daddy did them murders."

Purvis chuckled. "Yeah, I thought he'd come up with something like that," he said. "Nobody likes to think his own kin could kill another person, especially a girl. But look at the evidence, Gid. After all, there was only the one shot fired up there on The Knob, and most people in town heard it."

"Gid thinks different."

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"Now, Gid, you ain't goin' into all this business about gun silencers and all them fancy things you read about in books, are you? We don't hold much with that kind o' stuff around here."

"No silencers, Purv," said Gideon softly.

"Then what?"

"I'm just going by the story you and Aaron here told me. Accordin' to that, there wasn't just one shot fired on The Knob that day. There were three."

"Three? But we both said your Paw just fired the once."

"And so he did, Purv—at the deer. But you also told me that when you spotted my Paw you fired two warning shots into the air."

"Why sure, but—"

"Only one of them wasn't a warning shot, was it, Purv?" Gideon roared out suddenly, rising to his feet. "One of them was the shot that smashed clear through Tad's chest!"

Purvis looked at Twichell, an odd grin on his face. "You don't believe this crazy talk, do you, Aaron?" he asked.

"Sounds like it just might make sense, Purv," said Twichell. He brought his hand up from behind his desk. In it was the .38 pistol he usually wore in the holster on his hip. The barrel of the pistol was pointed straight at Purvis.

"I reckon you'd better let me have your gun, Purv," said Twichell softly. "At least until we get this straightened out. It wouldn't do for me to take the chance of bein' shot with a gun I'd issued to you myself, now would it?"

Keeping one eye on the gun pointed at him, Purvis carefully withdrew the pistol from his holster and laid it on the desk. "Why—why would I want to do a thing like that, Aaron," he said in a shaky voice.

"Gid seems to think you was one of the boys who was sparkin' Lucy Hawkins," replied Twichell. "Only that one time you went too far and she threatened to tell her daddy on you. You knew that would be the end of your job, so maybe you just took out your knife to scare her a little bit. I wasn't there, so I can't say for sure, but maybe you nicked her a mite and she began screaming. One thing led to another, and you killed her. Only you didn't know you'd been spotted by Tad Peckinpaugh. The funny thing is, he probably didn't recognize you in the dark. But you was afraid he might have, so you had to get rid of him, too. Gid, do you feel calm enough now to go on with what you told me?"

"I think so, Aaron," said Gideon. "Purv, the way I've got it figured, my Paw really went huntin' that morning. But maybe with a little help from you, word got around that he might be going after Tad. So you talked Aaron

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into lettin' you go up to look for him. Only you didn't do any looking. As soon as you heard Paw shoot—at the deer, Purv—you ran up to Tad's cabin. There you fired off two shots from that pistol of yours. One of 'em went into the air, all right. But the other was the one you killed Tad with—to keep him from talkin' Then you just waited until my Paw came by to see what the shootin' was about and you put him under arrest. He had one of his spells from the excitement, and even after he came to, he was too muddle-headed to know what really happened."

Purvis looked at the sheriff. "I think you've gone bad in the head like Gideon and his Paw, Aaron," he said. "A man from the insane farm steps off a bus and right away you start believing every word he says. Remember, I got this trying to save your Paw, Gid." Purvis rubbed the scar on his forehead.

"Yeah, that shows how far a man will go to back up a lie," said Gideon. "One hard bang with a gun stock, and who's to say you're not all pure and clean of guilt? Only it won't work this time, Purv."

"So far all you've got is his story, Aaron," said Purvis. "Ain't we had enough of this? Where's his proof if he thinks I'm the man who killed Tad?"

"I've got proof," said Gideon. "It was up there on The Knob all this time, just waiting for me to find it." He reached down beside the sheriff's desk.

"I heard about them horns," said Purvis. "They don't show nothin' except that a deer died up there."

From behind the desk Gideon rolled out a log of apple wood. It was two feet long and almost a foot in diameter.

"There's my proof, Purv," said Gideon. "The way I figured it, Tad was out there in the clearing by his house when you came by, and he was reading. Do you remember the Bible that was found near his body?"

"I never said he couldn't read."

"Yeah, but he was found lying under that apple tree. I figured that most likely he'd been sitting down, leaning his back against the trunk. Right, Purv?"

"It's your story," growled Purvis.

"If that's where he was and if you shot him and if the bullet passed clear through his body, then it seemed to me like it must still be in that tree trunk. So last night Aaron and me, we went up there on The Knob with a gasoline chain saw. That machine made a lot of noise and probably woke a few people up, but that couldn't be helped. We cut the trunk of that tree into two logs and lugged them down into town."

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"Yeah, but that log ain't even been cut open to see—"

"We took the logs over to Parisburg in my truck," Twichell interrupted. "It was Gid's suggestion, and a good one. There's a doctor over there who has an x-ray machine. We had him take pictures of both logs. And in this one there's a chunk of metal just about the size of a bullet."

Aaron turned to Gideon. "Step out into the store there and get me an ax, will you, boy?" he said. "We're going to have a look at that thing inside this log. It wouldn't be hard to figure out whether it came from a .30-.30 deer rifle or if it's a .38 bullet from that pistol of Purv's."

When Gideon returned with the ax, Aaron motioned for him to split the log. Gideon placed the log on end and struck it with the ax. The log split apart.

"The floor won't take much of that kind of punishment," said Aaron. "But there's the metal, just where the x-ray picture said it would be. And it's a bullet, all right."

It took almost another quarter of an hour for Aaron to pry out the lead slug with his pocketknife without scratching it. Finally however, he held it in his hand. "I never did see a deer rifle bullet that big," he said, holding it between thumb and forefinger. "Did you, Gid?"

Gideon took the slug from the sheriff. "Nope," he said, examining it. "'Course the experts will have to look it over. But it's in good shape. I don't figure they'll have much trouble matching it to Purv's gun if they're as good as I read in the magazines."

Two days later Aaron Twichell stood with Gideon Granger in front of the dry goods store of Cannon Gap while the bus driver revved the motor impatiently. "So long, Gid," said the sheriff, "and good luck to you wherever you're going. By the way, I got the report on the phone this morning. The slug matched Purv's gun, all right."

"Goodbye, Aaron," said Gideon, picking up his suitcase. "And thanks. Maybe I'll come back here and see you after I've found a job somewhere."

"No, boy," replied Twichell, shaking his head. "Don't you ever come back. If you do I'll run you out of town the minute I set eyes on you."

Gideon looked at the sheriff, a hurt expression in his eyes. "Why, Aaron?" he asked. "I thought we were friends."

"A few days back, boy, you called the people of this town murderers because of what they did to your daddy."

"Yes, but—"

"You've shown us what we are, Gid. Nobody—not even me—could stand having you around to keep remindin' us."

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THE MOTIVE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

BURM.

He was a small dainty man with small hands and feet and with gray, serious eyes. His hair was white, giving him a kind of anonymous distinction. Nevertheless no one noticed him as he approached the display building, which housed a permanent exhibit of the power company's atomic energy plant.

He came alone, which set him clearly apart, for most of the other people arrived in family groups. They came for the afternoon showing of a promotional movie, and to expose Junior to the world of science. They'd been told that the film shouldn't be missed, and that the guides in maroon blazers were college graduates and physicists, who knew all about atomic energy and could explain it in detail. Junior would not only learn something, he'd even enjoy it. Consequently a succession of Juniors were led here, where they chewed bubble gum and gazed at the movie in the fifty-seat theater and then squirmed through the short lecture.

Burm sat down in the end seat

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in the fourth row. The movie appeared to fascinate him. When the scientist-guide explained how the atom was split, Burm listened carefully, but when the guide with the bushy mustache suggested that anyone who wanted to see the nearby power plant could visit it now, Burm slipped away from the sightseers and went out to his car.

He lived fifteen miles away, and he drove home thoughtfully. He stopped off at the overlook that commanded a panorama of the valley, and three couples noticed him and one couple remarked how beautiful the view was. He agreed—but he found no real joy in it.

Shortly after five thirty he reached his house, which was a small shingle affair near the foot of a dead-end lane. He parked in the garage, which he closed and locked before he entered the house. He was a careful man.

His wife called to him from the kitchen. "I heard the car. Where were you?"

He went as far as the doorway, so that he could see her before he spoke. His voice was low, without emotion. "Been driving," he said.

"I know, but where?"

"Just around. Trying to get used to being retired."

"You need something to do," she said. "Just driving around isn't enough. You have to go somewhere and do something."

"I'll find something," he remarked.

He went back to the living room, sat down in his favorite chair, and picked up the paper. Then, as if he were committing a sin, he got up quietly and poured himself a glass of sherry. For the rest of his life he maintained the habit he started that evening. When his wife noticed she asked him why he needed the drink. He shrugged. "It's good for me," he said. "Be good for you, too."

The following afternoon he returned to the power company display, and again he sat in the end seat in the fourth row. Although the young blond guide who looked as if he were barely out of high school appeared to notice him, Burm was not sure if he was recognized as having been there the previous day.

On the third day both the blond lad and the guide with the bushy mustache were definitely aware of having seen Burm before. They were puzzled, and they exchanged a few quick words. They did not speak to Burm, but he felt that some interchange of feeling had taken place between them and himself, and thereafter he never thought of the display room without seeing that particular pair of guides in it. They came to symbolize it and, although they were in no manner friends of his, they occupied a place in his mind usually reserved for friendship.

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They had become familiar to him.

On the fourth day, when Burm went to the display room, the blond lad addressed him.

"You've been here before, haven't you?" he said politely. He looked scrubbed and clean and without guile, and Burm felt proud of him.

Burm nodded. "Yes," he said.

"Just stop in for a rest?"

Burm didn't answer.

"You can't like our show *that* much," the boy said, smiling.

"I don't like it at all."

Then came the direct question. "In that case, why do you come here?"

Burm frowned, and moved away to take his seat in the fourth row.

On the fifth day the two guides approached him, the blond one acting as spokesman.

"We don't like to bring this up," he said, "but you know, you can't keep coming here every day."

"Why not?" Burm said.

"Because it's not allowed."

"This is open to the public, you have no right to keep anyone out. I can come whenever and as often as I like."

"If you'd just tell us why."

Burm shrugged and sat down. Fourth row, end seat. And that was the end of the first week.

On the first day of the second week he was there again. It was quite obvious that the guides were now annoyed, and had decided to do their best to make him feel uncomfortable. And that, he told himself, was about all they could do. However, this time Burm was followed home.

He supposed the power company had its own investigative staff, although possibly they had hired an outside agency. Either way, it was quite clear that the big man in the black car was a professional, and that he meant business.

Burm stopped off at the overlook, and the big man in the black car stopped there, too. When the big man remained in his seat, Burm walked over to him. He was a mountainous man with great fleshy features, and Burm's voice squeaked with timidity.

"Are you enjoying the view?" he asked.

The big man mowed Burm down with a pugnacious look. "You tryin' to kid me?" he demanded.

"Oh, no. I just thought, since you followed me—well, I guess you'd like to ask me some questions."

"You got that much of it right, so tell me why you go there every day. What are you after, anyhow?"

Burm avoided answering the question. "Don't you want to know where I live?" he said.

"I'll find out."

"I don't mind making things easy for you."

"Then cut all the doubletalk and tell me what you go there for."

Burm backed off slowly, turned

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on his heel, and went to his car. When he pulled out to the road, the black car followed, and it trailed Burm as far as his house. The big man made no attempt to enter.

As usual, Burm found his wife in the kitchen. "Where were you today?" she asked.

"Around. I went for a ride."

"That's all you ever say," she remarked. There was an edge to her voice, and she faced her husband belligerently. "You're hiding something from me."

He walked off, but he heard her yell at him. "I'll get it out of you!"

He sipped his sherry. It was sweetish, and he decided to change his brand.

On the second day of the second week it rained, and the audience in the display room was small. Burm felt lonely and isolated, and the guides avoided even looking at him. He fidgeted during portions of the movie, as if he were bored by it, but other portions engrossed him as completely as they had the first time he'd seen them. The guides commented, later on, on this selectivity of interest.

He drove straight home. His wife met him at the doorway, and her concern was obvious.

"Somebody's been asking questions about you," she said. "A couple of the neighbors told me about it. They said a big man who looked like a cop had asked what you were like, what hobbies you had, how you got along with people, and whether you'd ever threatened anybody."

"Me?" he said.

"Yes. And he knew a lot about you, too."

"There's not much to find out," he said mildly.

"What are you doing?" she asked angrily. "Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"Of course not."

"Then where do you go every day, that you won't tell me about it? And why did you start drinking?"

"One little glass of sherry isn't drinking. And I told you—everybody my age ought to have a nip before dinner. The doctors say so."

"Doctors!" she muttered, and stalked back to the kitchen.

When Burm arrived at the display room on the fourth day of the second week the blond guide spoke to him again.

"Mr. Wembley, in the executive offices, would like to talk to you," he said. "I'll take you over there."

"After the show," Burm said. "I'll be glad to, then."

"All right. I'll bring you."

Mr. Wembley was a vice-president in charge of something or other. He had two attractive secretaries in his outer office. His own inner sanctum had a rose-colored carpet, a couch, and a console which might have been a TV set or might have been a bar. His desk had a couple

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of impressive piles of paper.

"Make yourself comfortable," he said, getting up and shaking hands. His voice was deep and resonant, effective in soothing complainers and convincing dissidents. "I thought we'd get to know each other a bit. Care for a drink?"

"Thanks," Burm said.

Wembley opened the console. "Just name it," he said.

Burm named it. Wembley mixed the drink and Burm sipped it. Then Wembley mixed one for himself.

"This is all a little irregular," he said, "but Mr. Burm, you have us guessing. So far, everybody's asked you why, and you won't answer. Well, the mountain wouldn't come to Mohammed, so here I am coming to the mountain. What's on your mind, Mr. Burm?"

"Nothing."

"As I said, we're puzzled. We're up in the air. Confused, befuddled, disturbed. We've investigated you, and we can't find a thing wrong. No history of mental disturbance. No grudge against the company. You've always paid your bills on time and have never complained. You worked as an accountant for forty years for the same firm, and retired on half salary. You have some savings, you get your social security, you own your car and your home free and clear. In other words, you're sitting pretty. And what's more, you've never been interested in atomic energy or public power, so I don't get it. And I come back to the direct question—what are you after?"

Burm was silent.

"This is a great company I work for," Wembley said. "I believe in service to the public. I believe in all that we do. I'm happy here. I have a good job, a good home, and a fine family. Can you say the same for yourself?"

Still remaining silent, Burm finished his drink. Wembley laughed and stood up. "Have another?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, I won't force you. But I've put my cards on the table, and the least you can do is the same. So tell me what's behind this. What's your reason?"

Burm smiled enigmatically.

"I'll tell you what," Wembley said. He took out his wallet and put it on the table. "I'll buy your reason, and with my own money, too. How much?"

"It has nothing to do with money," Burm said. He rose with dignity and terminated the interview. "It's been nice meeting you, Mr. Wembley."

Wembley laughed pleasantly. Then he stood up and held out his hand. "Nice meeting you too. I've enjoyed every minute of it. And any time you'd like to drop in here, feel free to come around. The door's open and the welcome mat is always out."

Burm had reason to doubt the

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sincerity of that last statement, for, while he was attending the movie and the lecture the following day, somebody let the air out of two of his tires.

He came home tired and late. His wife was grumpy and barely spoke to him.

On his way to the power company the next day he stopped off at the gas station which always serviced his car. "That kid who helps you afternoons," he said. "Could you spare him for a couple of hours?"

"Just so he's back around five. Why? What do you want him for?"

"I'd like him to sit in my car while it's parked. Somebody let the air out of my tires, and I think they'll do it again, unless somebody's watching."

There was a third guide on duty in the display room, along with the blond lad and the one with the bushy mustache. The three exchanged some kind of signal when Burm arrived, and the blond guide spoke in a low tone to the new man. Burm assumed he was being pointed out, and it bothered him to be regarded as a crank. He kept staring at the blond lad, who was ill at ease and overconscious of Burm. The boy's normally smooth lecture was jerky, and he made two slips of the tongue. Burm was sorry for him and hoped he'd be given a more suitable assignment, where he could work with formulas that had a mathematical exactitude, instead of with a human equation containing illogical and unpredictable elements—like Burm.

Burm, however, had his own worries, and as he took his usual seat in the fourth row it seemed to him that some kind of climax was approaching. Obviously the company was worried. They evidently thought he was dangerous and might be planning some unpredictable type of sabotage against the company, and were taking the possibility seriously. They had investigated his background, they had tried to scare him off, and a high company official had invested valuable time and energy in an attempt to find out Burm's motive. He'd given none. Since the company was losing, it was to be expected that they'd use stronger and more forceful methods against him.

Nevertheless, he had one enormous advantage. If the company was trying to stop him they had no idea what they were trying to stop him from. They couldn't prevent him from doing anything until they knew what they were trying to prevent. All they could prevent him from, then, was from living. Consequently Burm bought a hand gun.

Since it was illegal to purchase or own a hand gun without a license, and since Burm was unlikely to be granted one, he

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was forced to buy from a mail order house in another state. The transaction took some time, and he did not have possession of the gun until the end of the fifth week.

The fourth week was perhaps the most difficult of the entire period. First, both the blond lad and the guide with the bushy mustache were replaced, with the result that Burm now felt he was among strangers. The very effort that the two original guides had made to avoid speaking to Burm was, in a sense, a friendly gesture. They were aware of him, he had a relationship with them, and he was definitely drawn to the blond boy. Burm thought of him often and sometimes conceived of him as the son he had never had. With the departure of the blond boy and his companion, Burm's isolation was complete.

He realized he was close to failure. He searched his brain and his conscience continuously, and all reason advised him to desist. But in the end he could not. He was like a man driving along a narrow lane with high banks on both sides. The road becomes dangerously rutty, and the curves become sharp. He is aware that he has taken the wrong fork somewhere and that he's going in the wrong direction, but it is impossible to turn around. He must continue on until he finds some other road, or until his gas gives out. And he knows that there is no other way. Sometimes a project once started must be pursued to the end, regardless of purpose or the absence thereof.

A new form of harassment began on the first day of the fourth week. Shortly after Burm took his usual seat an attractive girl sat down next to him. He glanced at her, and she smiled back. She made a remark about the weather, and a pleasant but rather pointless conversation began. About the photographic display on the walls. About the view outside. About the maroon jackets on the guides. Nothing personal or important was said by either of them. They were merely marking time until the movie started. A few minutes after it did, the girl screamed.

"Take your hands off me!" she yelled. "Stop it—that man—"

As if by signal, the lights flashed on. The girl was standing up. A couple of buttons had been ripped from her blouse, and it was torn at the shoulders.

She pointed at Burm. "*He* did it!" she shrieked. "He tried to—"

The audience stared at Burm as if he were some kind of monster whom they hoped to see shackled and made harmless. He got up slowly.

"She works for the company," he said. "She was sent here to frame me, because I'm having some trouble with the company."

Doubtless his white hair and

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meek bearing had their effect. The girl turned and rushed out, and one of the guides approached Burm.

"I'm sure there's some misunderstanding," he said, loud enough for everyone to hear. "If she's a crackpot we owe you an apology, and you have it. As for her being employed by the company—that's utterly ridiculous." He spoke, then, to the rest of the audience. "I hope you have not been inconvenienced. But we open our doors to the public—we wouldn't do anything else—and occasionally people come in who don't really belong."

He smiled. His smile and his words restored good will. The audience settled back in their seats. They not only were enjoying a free movie, but they'd have an interesting story to tell their friends.

Burm left.

On the second day of the fourth week he was again followed by the big man in the black car and this time Burm felt that the big man meant business. There'd be an accident of some sort. The black car would crowd him, force him off the road. Or the black car would block him off and force him to stop, and then the big man would probably beat him up.

Burm stopped at the first roadhouse he passed, went inside, and phoned the state police.

He gave his name and address. "I'm on my way home and I'm being followed," he said. "I'm at the Good Fellow Inn on Route Eleven, and I'm afraid to go the rest of the way."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know."

"Who's following you?"

"A man in a black car, and he's waiting outside."

"We'll send somebody down. Just stay where you are until a trooper gets there. Then tell him your story."

Burm's appearance was sufficient evidence to establish his credibility. Furthermore, there was a black car parked across the road, and a big man was lounging behind the wheel. The state trooper told Burm to get in his car and head for home. If the black car followed, Burm was to slow to a crawl, then accelerate, then slow up again. If the black car still followed, Burm was to head for home in a normal manner. The trooper would keep the black car under surveillance and prevent any "accident" from happening.

The plan worked perfectly. On the open road, with plenty of traffic, the black car kept its distance, but when Burm turned off onto a side road the black car speeded up ominously. It was swinging out to pass him when a siren sounded. The black car dropped back, and what happened after that, Burm didn't know. He proceeded home without further incident.

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His wife met him at the door. "The police called," she said. "They want you to phone back. What happened?"

"Nothing." he said.

The police report was factual. The man who had shadowed Burm was named Raffelon. He was a licensed private investigator, and the power company had employed him to make a routine check on Burm, which Raffelon had been doing. He didn't know the purpose of the check, and there was no reason to hold him or to carry the matter any further. Was that all right with Burm?

He said yes and hung up. His wife kept questioning him with growing irritation, and they had the sharpest quarrel of their married life.

On the third day of the fourth week nothing happened until evening. But shortly after Burm got home the power went off. Since the neighboring houses showed lights, Burm was certain that the trouble was directed at him, personally.

It took several hours to restore power. His wife, annoyed to begin with, took out her anger on Burm.

On the evening of the fourth day the same thing happened. The Burms' power went off, the servicemen were slow in coming, and they were vague in stating the cause of the trouble.

On the fifth day Burm went to Wembley's office. Wembley greeted him as if he were an old friend.

"Glad to see you, Burm. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. Read this." Burm took a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and handed it to Wembley. "It's an account of the harassment I've been subject to. The girl who tried to frame me. Raffelon and how he tried to run me off the road. The business of letting air out of my tires. Turning off my electricity. If I'm annoyed any further or if anything happens to me, then carbon copies of this go to all the local papers, and the city papers, too. They'd love a story like this, but it's not the kind of publicity you care for, is it?"

Wembley chuckled goodnaturedly. "Why, Mr. Burm, I think you're making this all up. What's this about a girl? Framing you, you said?"

"You know all about her. You sent her."

"Now, now, Mr. Burm, you're on edge about something and I wish I could help you out. What I'd suggest is, you go over to our display room and relax. You're welcome there; go as often as you like and sit down and enjoy yourself. Okay?"

Confused by this new tactic and wondering where it was leading, Burm got up. At the disply room

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he found an armed guard.

On the fifth day of the fourth week Burm's wife left him. She said she was going to visit her sister, but it was apparent to Burm that she had other reasons.

"You've changed," she said to him. "I don't know what's come over you, except—"

"Except what?" he said.

"I won't take it lying down," she said angrily. "You'll be sorry about this!"

Burm had a miserable week-end. He missed his wife. He missed going to the display room. He missed having the opposition he'd coped with so successfully.

The fifth week dragged. He was jittery. He had no one to speak to. His neighbors treated him coldly, as if they'd heard some scandal about him and were trying to avoid him.

At the display room the armed guard was always waiting for him, and a third pair of guides had been assigned to take charge of the show. It was late September by now, the crowds were thinning out, and one rainy Wednesday Burm was the only visitor. One of the guides showed the movie, which Burm watched with his usual sporadic interest. But he wanted to yell out and ask the guides to say something, to resent him or argue with him or be friendly with him—he hardly cared which.

He slept badly that night, and the next day he had a persistent headache. He tried to cure it by drinking, and for the first time since he'd been in his twenties he got drunk. He had a hangover the following morning, and his hands shook and he didn't shave. He could hardly eat.

There were two other couples at the show, and when he spoke to them they turned away as if Burm were a dangerous lunatic.

The next day, the fifth one of the fifth week, he took his gun with him. He kept it in his pocket and he kept his hand on the stock, to prevent anyone noticing the sag of his pocket.

Over the week-end he got drunk again, and he made a resolve. He wasn't going to stand for the silent treatment any longer. He had a right to go to the display room, he had a right to speak to people, and he'd make them answer. He wasn't going to take it lying down. He'd been meek long enough, he'd stood enough from them. From now on, he'd show 'em!

It seemed to him that from the moment he entered the display room the atmosphere had changed. The place was crowded—it was some kind of holiday and children were here again, for the first time since school had started. He spoke to them and laughed, he patted them on the cheeks, and promised them candy after the show—which was no reason for the guard to tap him on the shoulder.

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"Better stop that," the guard said. "People don't like it."

"Don't like what?"

"Just take it easy," the guard said. "Or maybe we'd better go outside."

"You can't push me around!" Burm said furiously. "I've taken enough from you people. I don't know what you've got against me, but—"

He didn't mean to take the gun out of his pocket. He meant merely to make a gesture of objection, to assert his independence, to show the company that they couldn't do this to him. But somehow he made a mistake, and he heard a woman shriek and then a whole thunder of voices, and the thunder was a shot and he was falling, falling—

Wembley handled the incident for the power company. After making sure that a doctor had gone to the display building, Wembley tore up the sheet of paper marked *Attention of All Editors;* and dumped the pieces in his wastepaper basket. Then, in order, he questioned the guard, phoned a company lawyer, and called in the police.

Later Wembley spoke at length to the reporters. He praised the guard for his prompt action in protecting the visitors from the actions of a madman. He explained that Burm was apparently a psychotic who had some sort of grudge against the company and had threatened various members of its personnel. Wembley had no idea of the reason for the grudge, and he pointed out that the company had tried to disregard it. When, for instance, Burm sabotaged his own service cable and then complained that he had no electricity, the company quietly repaired the damage. Their records showed that Burm had done this twice in the previous week.

Burm's wife received the news with mixed feelings. Certainly, in the last few weeks, her husband's character had changed. She'd thought he'd been having an affair with another woman, and she was grateful that she had been mistaken. Obviously, as she pointed out to her neighbors, his mind had deteriorated. They all agreed.

A couple of days after Burm's death a woman in her sixties came to the display room for the afternoon showing. She was alone. The guides had a vague sense of having encountered her somewhere before, and they all noticed the rapt attention with which she watched the movie. When it was finished she identified herself and one of the guides brought her to Wembley's office.

He greeted her warmly. "Delighted to see you, Mrs. Warringer. You look so much like your daughter, I would have recognized you anywhere. In fact, I almost feel as if I was speaking to her instead of to you."

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Mrs. Warringer's eyes moistened. "I just came from the movie. I flew all the way east especially to see it, and I'm afraid I'm a little shaky right now. Beth seemed so alive, and to watch her at work in the laboratory—"

She broke off, and Wembley spoke up quickly. "She was a wonderful girl," he said. "She had a great future, and her tragic death in the auto accident affected all of us. If there's anything I can do, please tell me."

"There is a favor I'd like to ask. I have no recent photographs of her, and I wondered if I could have some stills of her made from the movie."

"Certainly," Wembley said graciously. "Our pleasure. I'll arrange for you to see the film again and you can pick out any frames you want."

"Thank you," Mrs. Warringer said quietly.

Wembley cleared his throat. He seemed genuinely glad that he could be of service, but his sympathy did not extend to forgetting the interests of the company. He approached the subject circumspectly.

"You said you came all the way east to see your daughter on film," he remarked. "From California, I imagine?"

She said nothing, and he went on smoothly. "Well, I'm glad you were able to manage it, and if you don't mind—could we have some pictures taken of you, to go along with this whole story? It's such an unusual one, the papers will want to interview you, and—"

"Oh, no—please!" Mrs. Warringer said, interrupting. "I couldn't—it would be too risky because—maybe I'd better tell you that Beth was the child of my first husband. We separated when she was an infant and he's never really seen her. But ever since he's been trying to locate me. He goes to places where he thinks I might come, and he waits and waits and waits. And if you had an article in the paper he'd be able to trace me. He'd hound me. He's such a strange and persistent man, he just never gives up and—but nobody can really understand unless they know him."

"Maybe I can," Wembley said, leaning forward. "His name was Burm, wasn't it?"

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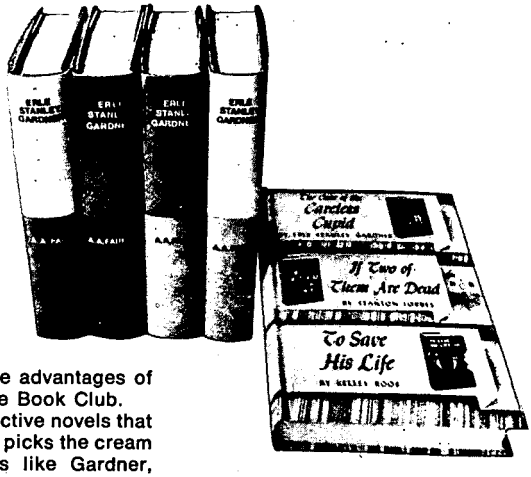

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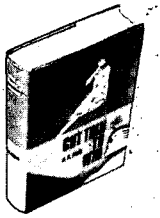

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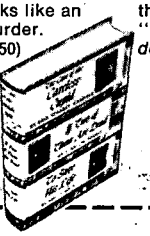

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